

Memphis police, Shelby County sheriff close ranks on crime

Until consolidation, cooperation is the battle cry

By Daniel Connolly

Friday, August 28, 2009

Memphis police and the Shelby County Sheriff's Office are taking baby steps toward increasing collaboration, starting with joint efforts to combat crime in problem areas including Old Allan Station in the northern part of the city.

Historically, the sheriff's office's main duties have included policing the areas outside city limits and running the county jail. As the city has grown over the decades, the overlap in the agencies' duties has grown, too.

The two forces already work together to combat problems ranging from drug trafficking to auto theft, and there are greater calls for cooperation.

"We've got some hot-spot areas where we are addressing drugs, gangs and guns," Memphis Police Director Larry Godwin said. "Those individuals are crossing over into the county and the county is crossing into us."

Local leaders have revived the idea of combining city and county governments, and citizens might even vote on the topic in 2010.

For now, there's no talk of setting up a consolidated police force.

But increased law enforcement cooperation was the topic some time ago at a meeting among Sheriff Mark Luttrell, Shelby County Mayor A C Wharton, County Commissioner Steve Mulroy and City Councilman Harold Collins, who is now council chairman.

That led to a meeting between Luttrell and Godwin and the decision to focus on problems in crime hot spots that straddle city and county boundaries.

These include the Frayser-Raleigh area, Hickory Hill and the Mitchell Road area in

8/31/2009

Memphis police, Shelby County sh...

the extreme southwest part of the county, Luttrell said.

Among the anti-crime activities will be "knock-and-talk" operations, when officers go into neighborhoods and gather intelligence by speaking with residents one-on-one, he said.

Though the agencies are focusing on border areas now, Luttrell said they're prepared to go wherever crime data takes them.

Godwin said they're working with University of Memphis criminology professor Richard Janikowski, and that they plan to start small and expand the program if it succeeds.

The sheriff's office has a pile of warrants and not enough people to serve them, Godwin said, so Memphis police could help.

That could make a big difference in crime rates, since a small number of criminals are often responsible for a large percentage of crimes, he said.

And county and city law enforcement officials can share intelligence information.

"We have the capabilities to do so much if everyone would just share their information," Godwin said.

Luttrell appeared before the county commission this week at the request of Commissioner Henri Brooks, who wants the sheriff's office to play a bigger role in patrolling the inner city to prevent crime.

"We have an antiquated paradigm, and it looks like we're not willing to make a change," she said later.

But Luttrell said there are legal limits on what the sheriff can do. For instance, the sheriff can't go into the city of Memphis and write tickets for violations of city ordinances.

-- *Daniel Connolly: 529-5296*



© 2009 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online