

COMMISSIONER'S CORRESPONDENCE – The critical role of community meetings in strengthening relationships, building partnerships

Since I joined the St. Louis Police Department in January, I have had the opportunity to attend dozens of community meetings, religious services, celebrations and town halls organized by elected officials, faith communities, neighborhood associations and other community leaders and groups.

While each meeting is held in a different place and might draw residents and community leaders from different areas of St. Louis, one thing always strikes me: these are gatherings of people committed to making their communities better.

These meetings are also important for our police department, because they are opportunities for our police officers and supervisors to engage with the residents they serve and to learn about the challenges facing their neighborhoods. Whether it involves a quality-of-life issue or a nuisance property, possible drug activity or more serious crime, we take the concerns of our residents seriously, and community meetings provide us a great chance to hear these concerns so that we can take action.

When I began my career in law enforcement more than 35 years ago, I was a patrol officer with the New York City Police Department. I regularly attended community meetings in my area, and was able to build relationships with residents and community leaders. I continued this trend in my subsequent departments, including Wilmington, Delaware – where police officers and supervisors continue to attend each community meeting in their assigned areas.

This is why I am so passionate about ensuring that our police officers attend these community meetings, and also why I would like to encourage all of our residents to do the same!

Besides providing an opportunity to share concerns with your local police officers, civic and neighborhood association meetings also provide the chance to hear about some of the work we are doing to make your city safer! We will also be highlighting many of these initiatives and crime strategies through our social media platforms in the weeks and months to come.

Finally, as we near the Thanksgiving holiday, I would like to thank each member of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department family for what they do each and every day to make our city safer. I was fortunate to attend two programs in the past week – including the 16th annual Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Officer Appreciation Banquet, and the Medal of Valor ceremony – that included recognition of distinguished and heroic acts by some of our police officers. Whether it involves deescalating volatile situations and supporting persons in crisis, or responding to incidents like the Central Visual and Performing Arts High School shooting last year, members of this department routinely risk their own safety in service to others – and these recent honors are great examples of the type of work our police officers do each day.

Our commissioned officers and civilian staff are dedicated to what they do, and I am proud to serve as chief of this department!