

City

A night on the town with the Chapel Hill police

By JIM GREENHILL
Staff Writer

Chapel Hill police officers spend most of their time sitting in patrol cars outside the fire station on Airport Road drinking coffee and eating doughnuts, right?

Wrong. The night of July 31 should have been about as calm as it gets. The student population is greatly reduced in the summer, and most of those in town were studying for final examinations. And it was a Monday evening. But there was little time for coffee for the officers I rode with, and I didn't see a single doughnut.

6:40 p.m. Seven public safety officers are briefed by Lieutenant Joe Jackson. Jackson runs through problems faced by the previous shift, a suicide and several thefts, and tasks for the new shift — chiefly "close patrols" of areas where there have been problems and a trailer packed with expensive equipment that a construction company has left in a parking municipal lot.

The officers are reminded of court dates and paperwork is handed out. There is input from officers, including discussion of the recent actions of known troublemakers — down to the information that one person had come into a store clutching a large wad of bills and "just had a pocketful of money."

7 p.m. Master Officer Felix Talbert, a member of Chapel Hill's SERT (Special Emergency Response Team) discreetly packs his shotgun into the trunk of his patrol car. In some cities such weapons are carried mounted on the dashboard, but Chapel Hill likes its "village atmosphere," Talbert says.

The town's "restrictive pursuit policy" seems related to the village idea,

too. Police in Chapel Hill will not necessarily try to stop a speeding car, but would sometimes just follow it into another jurisdiction. The concern is safety, Talbert says, citing a liability case against Greensboro police officers whose pursuit of a drunk driver ended in a wreck and two deaths.

"You wouldn't want to do a felony car stop in the middle of town where you've got a lot of innocent pedestrians," Talbert says. In view of the nation's liability problems, Talbert calls restrictive pursuit policies "the coming thing."

After testing out the car's lights and siren, we're on the road. The town is divided into four areas, and the object is to keep a car in each area all the time, Talbert says. There are seven police officers and a supervisor on patrol on any given shift, with the surplus cars acting as back-up wherever needed.

We drive around Talbert's assigned area, checking out property and looking at loiterers. "That's an interesting crew — the potential is there for who-knows-what," Talbert says, as we pass a group standing in the lot of a housing project.

7:30 p.m. There's a report of a gun fight near Durham-Chapel Hill Boulevard. Talbert would like to go, but it's outside his assigned area and there's no reason for it, unless it gets out of hand. Chapel Hill police aren't looking for drama. "All blue lights and siren is is television or big city stuff. It's 11 o'clock. Right now people are asleep," Master Public Safety Officer Jerrie Cole tells me later in the evening.

In the next two hours we help a woman with a stalled car on Columbia Street, patrol and run a check on a car whose driver acted strangely at a con-

venience store but don't stop him. "You just can't stop somebody because you don't like his looks," Talbert says. "You've got to have reasonable cause or probable suspicion."

While I'm with him, Talbert doesn't write any tickets for moving violations. He sees his job as being "helpful, understanding, public service-oriented, more so than strict law enforcement." He calls "being around people" the best part of the job.

"As a rule you're going to get the respect you deserve," Talbert says. "You can be nice to people even when you're arresting them." He also said he likes the excitement that can sometimes come with the job, "that rush of adrenalin."

Talbert is troubled by "human misery ... people hurt at car wrecks, people having a (heart attack). That's sad, the suffering part of it."

9:30 p.m. I've transferred to Officer Cole's car and we're on our way to a domestic disturbance. Like Talbert, Cole is wearing a "ballistic vest" made of kevlar. "If you can stand them, they give you a little bit of confidence going to a call," she says. "If you don't get scared in this job, you should get out."

9:45 p.m. The domestic dispute — a woman fighting with her boyfriend — at least temporarily resolved, we stop at the Zip Mart on East Franklin Street to take a report of two people acting strangely near the cash register. The clerks are worried because gas prices are about to go up and the rush to buy at the old price has resulted in a big "take" for the day.

Cole agrees to a "close surveillance" for the rest of the night and says she'll warn other officers about a potential threat to gas stations.

Two more domestic disturbances and a call from a businessman, wor-



DTH/Sarah Cagle

Officer David Quigley steps into his police car at 7 p.m., in preparation for the 12-hour night shift.

ried that there may be an intruder in his office, mark the next two hours. As we entered Ridgefield for one domestic call, Cole tells me "The worst thing you can do is pull into public housing with your lights on." It tends to make things worse, she says.

Cole doesn't think students create too many problems. "I guess the most contact I've had with students is running breathalyzers," she says. If she

has any advice, it's about drinking and driving, because she has seen the potential consequences. "Don't be stupid," she says. "Get a ride, get a taxi, just don't drive — what's so hard about that?"

One of the worst aspects of the job for Cole is car wrecks. "You get a certain detachment from what you're seeing," she says. "You get so caught up in helping out in any way that it

doesn't hit until later ... But another nice thing about this job is the support, the fraternity." There are three full-time social workers attached to the Chapel Hill Police Department and an employee assistance program.

11:50 p.m. I transfer to Officer Jack Waddell's car, and stay with him until just before the shift ends at 7 a.m. He responds to a report of vandalism. There's more filling out of reports and patrolling. We talk about the job.

"I had never really heard of public safety until I (saw) that ad for it in the paper — it works out really well," he says. Chapel Hill police officers are actually Public Safety Officers and their cars are labeled "Public Safety," not "Police."

In Chapel Hill the police and fire departments cooperate and are both responsible to the same public safety director. The police work as firefighters, and vice versa. It is Waddell's first day back on the beat after a month with the fire department.

Each officer I talk with has different primary concerns. Waddell's is juveniles. The worst part of the job is "having to deal with a lot of parents that neglect their children," he says. "You see it happen and they're not really given a chance ... The majority that get in trouble, it's from their parents not knowing where they are."

Waddell has no doubt about the cause of the worst problems. "Alcohol. It's not even close. It's a shame," he says. "Drugs cause bad problems. But the majority ... is alcohol-related. It's worse. I see what it does on a daily basis."

12:45 a.m. We go to a call at

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Vacant Franklin Street space to be filled soon

By AL RIPLEY
Staff Writer

A lack of parking and a new tax on downtown merchants has not deterred eight businesses from opening or expanding in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro downtown area this summer.

Vacant business space, including the former Logos Bookstore and Foister's Camera Store on Franklin Street, will soon be filled.

Copytron will move into the for-

mer bookstore at the corner of Franklin and Columbia Streets, from its present Columbia Street location, according to Copytron president Terry Boren. "I've wanted that location for years," Boren said.

The old Foister's Camera Store location will be occupied by Chapel Hill Sports Wear, an athletic apparel store, according to Debbie Dibbert, co-director of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro downtown commission.

"We're really excited about all this new activity and incoming business," Dibbert said. According to Dibbert, the leasing of Logos' old space was delayed by sublease and bankruptcy complications, and Foister's by sublease problems.

Kinko's Copies will also expand its operations into space previously occupied by the Haagen-Dazs Ice Cream Store and The Cookie Jar.

Copytron's expansion will increase

its space from 1,434 square feet to 2,500 square feet, Boren said. Kinkos' space will expand from 1,800 square feet to 3,800 square feet, according to manager Render Dahiya. Both Boren and Dahiya expect to have their new space operational by late August.

Monograms and More, a retail clothing and monogram store, and Compliments, an architectural antiques store, will open at 418 W. Franklin Street.

Homeward Bound, an antique and

gift shop, will open in the renovated gas station beside Fowlers Grocery Store.

The Point, located on 312 W. Main Street in Carrboro, will provide space for Maggie's Muffins and The Craft Gallery.

"We're looking forward to doing business on Franklin Street," said Kathy Sapp, co-owner of Chapel Hill Sports Wear, which will also open in August.

Sapp said she is concerned that a lack of parking downtown will deter potential customers from shopping and encourage them to shop at local malls instead.

Other business owners expressed concern over the rise in property taxes, but according to Dibbert, property taxes and parking concerns do not deter businesses from opening in downtown Chapel Hill.

The former Benetton's location does not have a lease, Dibbert said. It is not unusual for businesses to remain vacant between leases, she said.

Chapel Hill cost of living above average

By AL RIPLEY
Staff Writer

The cost of living in Chapel Hill in 1989 is above the national average, according to a cost of living index released by the American Chamber of Commerce Research Association (ACCRA).

The quarterly index list Chapel Hill as eight percent above the national average.

"The index tells us where we are in

relation to the rest of the country in terms of services and quality of life," said Sherri Powell, ACCRA researcher and communications manager for the Chapel Hill Chamber of Commerce.

The cost of housing is the main factor raising Chapel Hill's index above that of other Triangle cities. Housing costs in Chapel Hill are 30 percent above average, compared to 13.6 percent in Durham and 7.8 percent in Raleigh.

Durham and Raleigh have a cost of living that is two percent above average. The Outer Banks is considered the most expensive area in North Carolina, with a cost of living 11.1 percent above average.

The index total is based on local costs of grocery items, housing, utilities, transportation, health care and miscellaneous goods. Data from 268 urban areas in the U.S. was collected. Washington, D.C., ranked as the

most expensive place to live in the United States. The cost of living there is nearly 30 percent above average.

Chapel Hill's cost of living ranked above that of metropolitan regions including Baltimore, Dallas, Denver and New Orleans.

Powell said the index does not take into account local taxes, and it is not an accurate measure of cost of living fluctuations over time.

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