

Country Town Policing in the ACT gains community support

By Terry Browne

WITH the introduction of the pilot Country Town Policing program on October 4, Constables Dave Rugendyke and Mike Ward have received instant acceptance and support from the members of their 'country townships'.

For a trial period of 12 months, the ACT suburbs of Kaleen and a combined Ainslie and Campbell will be regarded as two separate 'country townships' for the purposes of the program.

The program involves the stationing of an experienced police officer in an area/suburb (equivalent to a 'country town') so that the officer can dedicate resources to the particular 'local' community. The police officer has the responsibility to the community to improve its safety and to become an integral part of it.

At the launch of the program, ACT Region Assistant Commissioner Peter Dawson praised the personal qualities of both officers involved in the trial and forecast that the program would prove to be popular with the community and provide a new and effective way of delivering quality police services to the ACT community.

He said that surveys of the Canberra community conducted over the past four years had established a public expectation that its police provide three fundamental services. Namely, response to reports of crime and calls for assistance, the investigation of crime, and a service concerned with reducing crime and improving neighbourhood safety.

The concept of 'Country Town Policing' was conceived as the best and most cost-effective means of meeting the community's expectation for the provision of a police service additional to that of the traditional services of response and investigation.

Assistant Commissioner Dawson said that while the traditional services are fundamental to policing, they are clearly



Constable Dave Rugendyke feels that he is having an effect on the youngsters of his 'country town'.

ineffective in satisfying the pressing community need for a reduction in crime and improving public safety.

He said that the concept behind Country Town Policing was not new.

"In my opinion, the best in policing can be experienced in hundreds of small country towns throughout Australia where the country town 'copper' and the townsfolk work together to maintain a peaceful community.

"Canberrans and police can immediately relate to this approach to policing, hence the term 'Country Town Policing' epitomises what we, the police and the people, hope to achieve in the ACT.

"Country Town Policing is being tested in the 'country towns' of Kaleen and Ainslie/Campbell over the next year. It will be evaluated by Market Attitude Research Services.

"I am confident of a successful out-

come to this trial and, with government support, look forward to incrementally expanding the concept of 'Country Town Policing' across all suburbs in the ACT while maintaining the response and investigation services," he said.

Assistant Commissioner Dawson applauded the work of Detective Sergeant Chris Lines in his assistance in developing the concept.

The Attorney General agrees

ACT Attorney-General Terry Conolly also wished the program well. He said that as the minister responsible for the provision of police services in the Australian Capital Territory, he congratulated Assistant Commissioner Peter Dawson, and the Australian Federal Police for this innovative approach to assist in the provision of an effective police service for the community.

"Country Town Policing is an experiment which is capable of providing a better police service both in terms of effectiveness and quality and in terms of efficiency and value for the policing dollar.

"Its aim is to reduce the demand for police services through the development of community safety and the reduction in the incidence of crime," he said.

The minister stressed the empirical nature of the experiment, saying that there were no predetermined directions or guiding instructions being issued to the police officers. The officers are expected to use their skills and knowledge, in consultation with the community, to develop strategies and utilise their resources to police the 'country town'.

Through the program each constable will be delegated many of the traditional functions of the supervising sergeant and will have the authority, autonomy and flexibility to develop and pursue their own policing plan. However, the police officer will have, when required, access to the full range of resources available to the Australian Federal Police, ACT Region.

Mr Conolly said, "It is likely that the outcome of Country Town Policing may vary between the two trial communities as the respective police officers and communities apply their individual



Constable Mike Ward as local police officer for the 'country town' of Ainslie/Campbell has raised local business awareness of the Safety House program. At right, General Manager of Ainslie Football Club, Maurice Reilly, presents to the Area Coordinator of the Safety House program, Alannah Fromholz, a cheque for \$500 to go towards the cost of safety house signs.

strategies. However, the experiment will be evaluated in twelve months following community surveys and, if considered successful in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, it is likely to be extended to other local communities.

I am confident that the experiment will be successful and that the residents of the Australian Capital Territory will benefit from better personal interface with

the police as a result of 'Country Town Policing'.

The Attorney-General hoped that the residents of Kaleen and Ainslie/Campbell communities would become familiar with their particular police officer through frequent contact as they participate in their community activities, patrol their neighbourhoods on foot and by bicycle, and attend to much of the criminal and community activities in their suburb.

Community and business support

With a hectic first month under their belts Constable Rugendyke and Constable Ward gained welcomed communications support from Optus in the form of the latest in mobile phone technology.

For the trial period Optus has issued each officer a Philips mobile phone to ensure that they are readily contactable. While their offices are equipped with a combination phone, fax and answering machine, the mobile phone makes them readily accessible while they are out in the community.

In presenting the phones, Anthony Lee, Federal Government Account Executive for Optus, said that as a Canberra resident and a representative of Optus he was pleased to see a major communications company playing a part in what appeared to be a positive step in community policing.



Optus communications have enhanced communications in the program by providing both officers with the current model mobile phone. Back row (l to r) Assistant Commissioner Peter Dawson, Mr Paddy Costanzo, Optus Industry Development Manager. Front row (l to r) Mr Anthony Lee, Optus Federal Government Account Executive, Constable Dave Rugendyke and Constable Mike Ward.