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Senior Volunteers Help Police Officers and Save City Millions

by Alex Houston

Since its inception more than a decade ago, West Covina's SHOP (Seniors Helping Our Police) program has been a model of success. The program allows senior citizens to channel their energy back into the community by performing non-hazardous public safety duties on a volunteer basis.

When SHOP was created, it was an innovation to use volunteers out in the field, especially in the world of public safety. But as the program grew and matured, this concept quickly caught on.

Since 1993, SHOP personnel volunteered a total of more than 126,000 hours; marking more than 10,700 abandoned or illegally parked vehicles; performing more than 16,500 vacation house checks for residents; serving more than 6,700 subpoenas; issuing more than 28,200 parking citations; working more than 6,000 hours on traffic details; and more.

The SHOP volunteers' public service benefits West Covina tremendously. Residents enjoy increased police services without a larger police budget. Police officers are no longer tied up perform-

ing non-hazardous tasks and are now more available to fulfill essential police duties in the field. Finally, the senior volunteers themselves have meaningful, engaging activities that keep them connected to the community.

At the salary rate of an entry-level police officer, the hours that SHOP personnel have volunteered translates into more than \$3 million in cost savings.

The SHOP program has been repeatedly honored with prestigious awards that recognize innovation and prudence. In 1999, the SHOP program received a national award from the Foundation for Improvement of Justice in the category of lowering the cost of law enforcement. In 2001, the program received the Winston Crouch Award for Innovation in Government from the American Society for Public Administration.

Presently, the 30 SHOP volunteers work two-person field teams each day, seven days a week, handling traffic control at collision sites, writing parking citations, delivering legal documents, conducting vacation house checks, locat-



Veteran SHOP Volunteer Bill Clark has personally volunteered more than 15,000 hours of service.

ing abandoned vehicles and more. Instead of being trained by sworn officers, veteran SHOP personnel teach the new volunteers, making the training largely self-sufficient.

For more information on the SHOP program, call the West Covina Police Department at (626) 939-8557.