Community policing goes online

Since Kansas City Police joined Nextdoor, a new neighborhood social media site, in mid-July, party houses have been shut down, speeding problems have been addressed and officers have worked with neighbors to resolve a burglary pattern.

Fortune Magazine calls Nextdoor “A Facebook for crime fighters.” Others have referred to it as a “virtual neighborhood watch.” It’s a 2.5-year-old social media platform used by more than 150 Kansas City neighborhoods, and now, nearly 80 KCPD officers.

Nextdoor is a free, private, social network for neighborhoods. Each neighborhood site is launched and maintained by its residents, and members must verify their addresses to participate. More than 6,000 Kansas City residents already were using it when KCPD joined Nextdoor with City government on July 10.

Nextdoor is used in 200 cities and more than 37,000 neighborhoods nationwide.

Nextdoor began as a way for neighbors to get to know one another better. It was a forum for help finding a lost pet, hiring a nearby babysitter or borrowing a needed item. But it has quickly turned into an incredibly useful community engagement tool for police.

“We don’t intend for Nextdoor to be a replacement for face-to-face contact, but rather a complement to what we’re already doing,” Deputy Chief Randall Hundley said at the July 10 press conference launching Nextdoor. “We look forward to residents being able to provide us information about safety concerns in their neighborhood and working with them to address those concerns.”

And residents have done just that. In just the two weeks since officers started using it, hundreds of neighbors have reached out to them through the site, allowing patrol officers an ongoing dialog with residents concerned about the safety of their neighborhoods. So far, officers have helped residents with concerns about speeders and stop sign violators, car break-ins, party houses and more. Residents have even invited police to their community picnics and to see their gardens through Nextdoor. Officers also have informed the neighbors about police activity and crime trends in their neighborhoods. The department trained nearly 80 officers to use the system.

Some responses from residents to KCPD on Nextdoor have included:

- “Thank you for protecting our neighborhoods. I appreciate the police presence in the area.”
- “Thank you for your efforts to stay in touch with South Kansas City residents. As president of my homes association, I am thrilled that we are opening up more avenues of communication and truly hope that neighborhood safety reaches an all-time high.”
- “So nice to have another access route provided by this site for an opportunity to converse with a member of KCPD. I see this being helpful for getting tips on neighborhood issues that a person may not want to call 911 for.”

An additional 2,200 Kansas City residents have joined Nextdoor since police came on board July 10. And if things continue like they have in other cities, having police use Nextdoor will make it more appealing to residents. Fortune Magazine reports that in every city where a police department joins, activity on Nextdoor surged, like 230 percent in Dallas and 200 percent in San Diego.
During the opening of this year’s annual KCPD/National Law Enforcement Training Center Reasonable Use of Force Conference on July 14, a defensive tactics training room was dedicated to James “Jim” Lindell.

Mr. Lindell served as the supervisor of the Physical Training and Defensive Tactics Section at the Kansas City Police Academy from 1970-1993. His outstanding devotion and contribution in the field of defensive tactics, subject control, and reasonable use of force training for officers around the world has saved countless lives.

On July 2, our Mounted Patrol officers surprised 4-year-old Alex at Children’s Mercy Hospital where he was recovering from surgery. “He loved meeting the horses, so this was quite a treat,” a Children’s Mercy spokeswoman said.

Imagine strutting across a stage in front of hundreds of people wearing a bikini while appearing sassy and confident. Project Officer Gwen Merino of the Research and Development Division did just that. She participated in the WBFF – World Beauty Fitness and Fashion Amateur Show— at the Arvest Bank Theatre at the Midland on May 31.

She can now check that off her bucket list.

Five years ago, Merino gave birth to her daughter Paige. Wanting to return to her pre-baby figure, she joined the Hitch Fit Gym, lost the weight and got down to 15% body fat. After having her son Mason, Merino hit the workout circuit again. She didn’t stop there.

Admiring her friend Brandi Wisdom, wife of East Property Crimes Detective Bobby Wisdom, who has competed for the past several years, she decided to sign up. Merino said she has always been physically active, but never to this level. This was her first competition.

“I ran, but never knew about nutrition or how lifting weights really affected you,” she said.

On March 9, she committed to a 6 day-a-week, 12-week regiment. Keeping up with work, the kids and their activities, home duties, exercising and food prep would not have been possible without the support and encouragement from husband, Officer Joe Merino, she said.

Her routine consisted of morning cardio, afternoon weight lifting and more cardio. She also adjusted her eating habits with more balanced meals, achieving her goal of changing fat to muscle and becoming leaner. She said the training was physically tough but the mental challenge was more difficult.

“I just wanted to see how far I could push myself,” she said. “It was really competing against yourself, not really everybody else.”

The event featured three divisions – Bikini, Fitness and Fashion. Merino competed in both the Bikini Division Short (5’4” and under) and the 35 and Older classes, placing in the Top Ten in the latter. There also was an evening gown event.

Gaining more confidence was the major benefit she garnered from the experience. Looking like she owned the stage, Merino said she was nervous and her legs were shaking. It all comes down to your stage presence: look and act sassy, she said.

Her story is highlighted on Hitchfitgym.com. She was also featured and interviewed on KCTV-5.

She appreciates the fact that she is able to work out while on duty, realizing not everyone has that opportunity. She said it was a life-saver, and she couldn’t have done it otherwise.

Every year, Merino says she tries to accomplish one big fitness event.

“I always need a new challenge,” she said.

She will be competing in the upcoming Heartland 10k Series; three 10K’s in three weekends – Broadway Bridge Run, Plaza and Dot to Dot.
Bret Saberhagen visits KCPD

On Wednesday, July 9, former Kansas City Royals pitcher Bret Saberhagen, wanting to give back to the community, visited the South Patrol Division. He brought lunch to approximately 30 officers, detectives and commanders who had worked on the highway shooter case back in April. There, they were able to visit, ask questions, get an autograph, a picture and enjoy lunch with Saberhagen. They also received tickets to a Royals game where their colleague, Officer Joe Miller, was recognized. He was honored at the game through a First Responders Recognition program for his efforts in helping crack the highway shooter case.

Ex‘Cy’ting changes to the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation of Kansas City has new life thanks to a new president familiar to many at the KCPD. Cy Ritter took over as the Foundation’s president in March, and in July, he presented the Board of Police Commissioners with the first major donation: a $10,000 Care Trak system that will help police locate autistic children and elderly adults with dementia who wander.

The Foundation incorporated and got its non-profit 501(c)3 status in 2009, but it has been slow to get off the ground. That’s all changing now that Ritter is president.

Ritter knows the needs of the police department well. He retired as a deputy chief in 2011 with 29 years of service. He then served as deputy director at Jackson County Corrections, which is where he was in February when he got a call from Betsey Solberg, chair of the Foundation’s Board of Directors. She offered him the relatively new full-time position of Police Foundation president.

“He gave the Foundation new energy,” Solberg said. “He brought the expertise we badly needed. … He obviously is eminently qualified. When he was deputy chief, he studied and learned about police foundations.”

She said Ritter also is the ideal person for the job because of his institutional knowledge.

“We realized having someone who had a close relationship with the Department and knew it inside and out was the best person to run this Foundation,” Solberg said.

She said it’s up to the board members to do the fund-raising, but having Ritter along has helped tremendously. She said he has brought credibility to the projects the Foundation seeks to fund, convincing private donors that their money is going to a worthwhile place.

The Foundation seeks to provide KCPD with equipment and training that will lead to a safer city.

Ritter said the Care Trak system was the Foundation’s first major gift, but much bigger things lie ahead. Up next is an eight-phase surveillance camera project that will cost $6 to $7 million. Ritter said City Manager Troy Schulte has agreed that the city will match every dollar the Police Foundation raises for the project.

The first phase of the project involves 20 mobile surveillance cameras that the police department can install and move wherever needed, such as in high-crime areas or at large-scale events. Those will cost about $255,000. Ritter said the Foundation already has raised about $113,000 of that, so with the city’s matching funds, he hopes to have the cameras purchased and deployed by the beginning of September. Future phases of the project will involve schools, businesses, roadways, other nearby cities and an upgrade to the Law Enforcement Resource Center.

Under Ritter’s leadership, the Foundation also has a new web site, www.policefoundationkc.org, and will have a banquet in February 2015. Donations can be made on the web site.

Ritter said the Foundation’s vision is to make Kansas City one of the safest cities in America.

“We hope to become a multimillion-dollar foundation that supports the Police Department in the way the City wants to but cannot afford to,” he said.

Solberg also praised the work of Major Rick Smith, who helped Ritter research police foundations and has served as a liaison between the Foundation and the Department.

“We could not be where we are without Rick Smith,” she said. “He has been so patient and cares so much about the Police Department.”
Upcoming Events

July 10
Board of Police Commissioners Meeting (Academy)

July 31
25-Year Ring Ceremony

August 26
Board of Police Commissioners Meeting (South Patrol Division)

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Officially Speaking

Awards
Meritorious Service Award
Sergeant Jonathan Rivers
Sergeant Ryan Mills and Officer Matthew Masters
Administrative Assistant Karen Smith

Retirements
Sergeant Jeffrey Barnett
Master Patrol Officer Nancy O'Rourke
Officer Christopher Clark
Officer Martin Healy

Obituaries
Retired Captain Robert McKinney
Retired Officer Bobby Thompson

The mission of the Kansas City Missouri Police Department is to protect and serve with honor and integrity.