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Responsibility for Visitor Safety: Park Law Enforcement

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PARTNERSHIPS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

responsible for visitor safety . . .

Park Law Enforcement

By Chief Patrick Oliver
Cleveland P.D.

What does park law enforcement mean to millions of people who yearly visit Cleveland Metroparks? It's having someone available to assist them during their time of need. Cleveland Metroparks Ranger Department serves this need by providing daily 24-hour protection, every day.

Cleveland Metroparks Ranger Department strives to be a premier park district law enforcement agency through education, service, pride and integrity. Rangers are sworn law enforcement officials and have the same powers of arrest as municipal police officers. They are responsible for visitor safety and for the protection of the Park District.

Rangers pride themselves on serving visitors by answering questions, providing information and assisting with emergencies. Responsibilities include patrolling Cleveland Metroparks with its more than 19,000 acres of land and 100 miles of parkways in 13 reservations. Park District facilities range from picnic areas, play fields, swimming areas, wildlife management areas, stables, tobogganing, skating and cross-country skiing. The Ranger Department maintains Park District rules and regulations throughout Cleveland Metroparks.

Cleveland Metroparks Ranger Department has similar goals in comparison with urban police departments: service, protection, education, and integrity. Rangers also have a unique set of challenges as steward of Cleveland Metroparks.

One difference in what a park ranger encounters is that the public they serve are park district visitors. The ranger's objective is to ensure the visitor has a safe environment for enjoying recreational activities. In a park district setting, law enforcement officers ensure that a sense of personal safety and assistance is available to park visitors.

When dealing with a crisis, rangers use their knowledge of the park district and available services to provide assistance and support to park visitors. There is a great disparity in coverage areas when comparing park law enforcement to that of an urban setting. Rangers often have vast areas of responsibility, where only a portion of the area is developed and easily accessible. Rangers are also not stationed in close proximity and often are the sole support in aiding a victim until rescue personnel arrive.

Rangers utilize various forms of patrol to cover areas frequented by visitors. Patrol may be performed by rangers in a cruiser, on foot, horseback or bicycle depending on the time of year.

Patrol cars are used all year and provide rangers the ability to cover a large area. Four-wheel drive vehicles enhance this coverage by their ability to traverse rugged terrain. Patrol cars also permit rangers to carry necessary equipment including lock-out tools, flares, rescue ropes and life jackets.

Mounted rangers (on horseback) are used to provide almost total accessibility to any area throughout Cleveland Metroparks, and are well suited for searches and for crowd and traffic control. They can also assist neighboring urban police departments when needed. Horses are also excellent for conveying a positive image toward park visitors.

Foot patrol is again being used by law enforcement organizations, but it has always been a necessary and beneficial tool for rangers. Many areas of the park district cannot be monitored from a patrol car. By hiking these areas, it reduces destruction of park district facilities. Foot patrol also allows the rangers to talk with park visitors and answer questions and provide information.

Bike patrols are now being seen in law enforcement work. Bikes can travel to many places and can assist in undertaking a variety of maneuvers that are impossible for rangers in vehicles. Bicycles are also well suited for the patrol of zoos, all-purpose trails, beaches and mountainous areas.

Monitoring of the public's activities once they enter the Park District is vital in preventing unlawful and unsafe behavior. Park rangers have far fewer man-made structures to hinder their observations of individuals. With modern management of park lands limiting unnecessary development, park districts basically remain unchanged. This allows rangers to become totally familiar with the land which assures quicker response on calls for service. It also allows rangers to position themselves to witness illegal and unsafe activities without being detected.

In the years ahead Cleveland Metroparks Ranger Department will continue to strive to deliver excellent service to the public through education, service, pride and integrity. **OPC**

Patrick Oliver is Chief of Police of the Cleveland Police Department. Prior to this position, he was responsible for the Cleveland Metroparks Ranger Department; other previous experience includes 11 years with the Ohio State Highway Patrol. Chief Oliver has a Bachelor of Arts degree in criminal justice and a Masters degree in business administration from Baldwin-Wallace College. He is a past president of the Cleveland Chapter of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives. Chief Oliver serves on the education committee of OACP and is a police management consultant within the advisory services division.