

The Face of the Police Force

Vince Higgins puts applied psychology to work for the MPD... BY AIMEE LEWIS ELLIOTTE ('92)



Vince Higgins ('01) THE MEMPHIS POLICE Department (MPD) gets a lot of press. No one knows this better than MPD's public information officer, Vince Higgins ('01). With an unbelievable 804,296 calls and 102,000 arrests in 2006, and at a time when city and county leaders, along with local CEO group Memphis Tomorrow, have spearheaded an ambitious crime-fighting plan to make Memphis the safest metropolitan area in the country by 2011, the MPD and Higgins have their work cut out for them.

Blue Crush, a data-driven policing strategy modeled after a program in New York City, is the signature

effort of the MPD's plan. The program utilizes new technology to create multi-layer, interactive maps of crime hot-spots based on data from the previous week's arrests and incidents. Investigators generate maps of crime patterns and focus resources on those areas.

In these hot-spots, crime does go down. Over a 15-year span, New York has been able to reduce their overall crime rate by 70 percent. With its program barely a year and a half old, Memphis has a long way to go, which keeps Higgins busy.

As the face of the Memphis Police Department, Higgins must respond to victims, their families, the department, and the media.

"The [MPD] averages over 2,500 calls for police service per day," Higgins said. "We average over 15,000 offense reports per month. There are over 2,000 police personnel on the department but only one public information officer. Daily I receive an average of 65 phone calls at my desk and 100 plus emails. I have a pager, a Blackberry, and a cell phone. All of the people who contact me judge my effectiveness by how soon I respond and what information I supply. Everyone focuses on the 'face' time on TV, but that only represents about five percent of the job. The feedback I need comes from family, friends, and acquaintances after the fact."

Higgins worked as a radio-electronics technician in the U.S. Navy until 1987 and then as chief engineer and part-time newsman for a local television and radio station, which surely has aided his public MPD role with the media. After the station was sold in 1989, the new owners were not interested in keeping on a full-time engineer and Higgins found his way to the police department.

"Initially, I applied for the police department at the behest of another CBU student, the late Memphis police officer Donald Williams ('93). Don knew that I really wanted to work with the City of Memphis' Radio Maintenance division. He suggested that I take the police position to gain 'city time' seniority in case a position opened. Once I became a police officer, I really began to enjoy the work of helping people; it became a ministry of sorts for me. Now, nearly 18 years later, I have no regrets."

Higgins became the MPD's public information officer in 2004.

Life experience counts for a lot in Higgins' field but

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he credits his alma mater with strengthening his abilities on the job. “There are literally dozens of ways my applied psychology degree from CBU has helped me as an officer,” he said. “Oddly enough, all simply point to the ability to deal with and help people in crisis. I sincerely believe my experience at CBU has given me the insight to ‘empty my vessel’ so to speak.”

Additionally, Higgins minored in Spanish at CBU. “Being bilingual is rapidly becoming indispensable in today’s society, especially here in the Mid-South. The ability to communicate effectively with our Latino population helps our department solve crimes that perhaps could not be solved without it,” he said.

But Higgins also says he misses being an investigator. “I miss the satisfaction of ‘getting the bad guy’. I miss the look on victim’s faces when I would tell them that a suspect was captured and charged. I miss the camaraderie with my partners and fellow investigators.” Still, in a field where the awful and the tragic get most of the press, Higgins’ role provides the satisfaction of being able to promote the MPD’s successes to the Memphis community. Other police officials are noticing as well; the Shelby County sheriff’s office and Detroit’s police have both studied Memphis’ progress and considered a similar program.



So what does someone in a 24-hour-a-day job do in his downtime?

“In my world, the words ‘free’ and ‘time’ cannot be uttered in tandem! I do like to read, golf, fish and bike ride with my wife and seven-year-old son. Incidentally, I met my wife, then Barbara Johnson, at CBU. She was an adjunct professor while I was there. She says I was an excellent student, although she gave me a ‘B’ in her class—Criminal Justice—go figure!” ■

Higgins fields an average of 65 phone calls from the media per day at his desk. That doesn’t count the ones to his cell or the 100+ emails.

Barry Carroll Addresses Seidman Audience on Meeting Energy Needs

BARRY CARROLL ('94), business development manager at Lurgi, Inc. was the guest speaker at the M. L. Seidman Town Hall Lecture Series at CBU on April 12. Carroll addressed the topic of “Meeting Our Energy Needs for the Future.”

Carroll is a noted expert in the area of biofuels. For the past ten years, he has worked for Lurgi, an international company with longstanding experience in innovative processes for gas generation and treatment. Lurgi’s strong research and development efforts have resulted in biodiesel technology which makes the company a world leader in the field of oleochemicals produced from renewable resources. Currently, Carroll is responsible for sales and key accounts.

Carroll holds a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from CBU, a masters’ degree in systems engineering from the University of Memphis, and is currently pursuing an MBA from CBU.

Mr. and Mrs. P. K. Seidman established the M. L. Seidman Memorial Town Hall Lecture Series in memory of M. L. Seidman, the founder of an international accounting firm who maintained an active interest in public issues. ■



Barry Carroll ('94)