

EAST PALO ALTO

EPA'S Chief of Police is a Man With a Mission

By Peter G. Fischer
Staff Writer

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I have also seen not only in the black community but in the general community as a whole, the value of life decline. To give you an example when I was a kid in Chicago there were gangs of course, not like today but there were gangs. I was always a member in some gang whether it was for sports or protection. I remember we used to have wars

against the other gangs and we would go to the railroad tracks and we'd have these little fights, but we fought with brick partials which were little pieces of chipped bricks. We would throw them at each other and that was considered a bit, big deal. I see the same kind of mentality in kids today. The difference is that they tend to use UZI's (automatic rifles) and Mac-10's as weapons of choice whereas we used bricks and sling-shots.

We pick up kids who became involve in little gang disputes. One incident in particular which galled me was one that started when somebody stepped on somebody's shoe at a roller rink and they got into a fight and it went on and on until eventually somebody went from house to house, car to car, and started spraying them with automatic rifle fire.

When we picked up one of the kids involved in the shootings, it was his devil-may-care attitude that was particularly galling to me." yea, we sprayed 'em, we sprayed 'em a.k.a get down." I meant nothing to him about where the bullets were going or who they would hit; life meant

nothing to him.

That's the essence of the problem. Much of the blame has been put on drug abuse. However the drugs are there because of the market and the money that can be made. It's readily accessible. So, when you have the accessibility of the drug, plus the lack of caring; the lack of self-esteem; the disregard of human life; it becomes very easy, when you get into an argument with _____, rather than to just punch him in the nose as we used to do in the old days, you take your uzi and you drop him. This goes on in E.P.A., East Oakland, Richmond and certain parts of San Francisco, and it's a curse of our time.

As far as solutions to this "curse" go, Chief Nelson feels that a combination of family support, church guidance and police support to get a helpful message to young people will help curl the devaluing of human life.

NELSON: I think the situation can be helped by the black families coming together. The black institutions the church for instance, has to get busy instead of just looking at the economic side or the 'grease my palm' attitude.

Policing is not the answer creating war zones is not the answer because what the _____ of this death will do is they'll just move outside the war zone and continue their activities that's been proven time and time again.

The answer is not more copies

it's family you've got to start early with the kids in grammar schools. You have to make an impact there. Part of the training can come from police because we know that the police are the most visible institution that exists in our society. If you look at television today, and most minority kids are glued to the T.V., what do you see? You see cops. Cops are everywhere. So we have a chance as police officers to deliver a positive message. With the coming of the first year anniversary of President Bush's war on drugs, I asked Chief Nelson if he felt that a President's policy had any effect.

NELSON: President Bush has a war on drugs in name only. We've to a war, but the war is in Iraq. Now that's a war, you bring in resources, you move your people, you do something we haven't done that with the drug problem.

I went back to Washington D.C. and talked with the office of the drug czar (William Bennet) in July 90' and I was so disappointed I left a day early. I did have an assistant who went both days but I just felt it was a waste of my time - and I'm not about wasting time.

They (U.S. Government) have a police and they have a strategy but they're not willing to devote any resources to it. I still don't see enough money coming down outside of the Law Enforcement field for education and schools.

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East Palo Alto Police Chief Tecumseh Dan Nelson

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SE HABLA ESPANOL

EPA'S Chief of Police is a Man With a Mission

By Peter G. Fischer

When East Palo Alto's Chief of Police began his job in 1985, he was the only man on the force. At 52, a tinge of grey on the sides, and an authoritative smile, Tecumseh Dan Nelson was a very busy man during the hectic first days of office.

"I had to do everything," said Nelson. "I really didn't have time to reflect upon my new position; the only thing I had time to do was start wondering where do I go from here?"

Nelson literally built the department from the ground up, doing everything from ordering office supplies and police cruisers to designing his own police badge.

According to Nelson, some African American youth are in a crisis situation when it comes to having an alarming disregard for life" which, in part, leads to their committing "senseless, lethal crimes."

He had much to say about his police department and the role that the African American family needs to play in ridding itself and our youth of some of

the feeling of "disregard for life."

Q. I first asked the chief why he came to East Palo Alto in the first place?

NELSON: The reason I came to E.P.A. was that I had just received the results of the (Richmond Police Department's promotion board) for the new chief of that department and I had come in second. That alone didn't necessarily disturb me, I think the guy that got the job had more time (on the force), and more experience. What was the issue was that since both the man they chose as chief and myself had the same amount of time left for our retirements. This meant that in order to implement some of my own ideas on policing, I had to leave Richmond.

The man Richmond chose as Chief may have had more experience but when it came to education, Chief Nelson was far from lacking. After graduating Crane Technical High School at Greer College also in Chicago. He then moved to the Bay Area and beginning in 1970 received a variety of law enforcement related certificates from various commu-

nity colleges, state and U.C. campus; finally receiving a B.A. in Justice Administration from Golden Gate University in 1974.

His education didn't end with his getting a job at Richmond Police department. "Looking back at my time (22 years) at Richmond, I had always been a mover. I had a series of rapid promotions. In fact, I was the first black command officer (1978) within the City of Richmond since the department is founding in 1900, so I was used to command positions." Some of the certificates the Chief completed included certificates in the investigation of violent crimes, civil emergency management, jail administration and two management certificates. When Chief Nelson decides to accept the task of heading up the East Palo Alto police department, the city was getting a law enforcement specialists.

NELSON: I came to E.P.A. in December 1984, I was the first police officer hired by the city to start a police department. The first day on the job was something of a shock to be honest with you. I had worked in the City of Richmond as a police officer for close to 20 years; I had carried a badge for 20 years. Once I left the Richmond department the first feeling I had was that for the first time in 20 years I had no badge, no police I.D. and was essentially a civilian. That was somewhat of a shock. As I was brought to E.P.A. I was the only one there and not only did I not have a badge, but they didn't have one to give me either.

Therefore, I had to create everything, number one was to design my own badge and my own I.D. card. I had to order cars we literally had nothing to start with. The first six months were interesting (r.e. trying) times. I put in 12-13 hour days, Saturdays and sometimes even Sundays. I had to hire staff. I had to order equipment and if you're familiar with starting up a new venture, if you order something it will never arrive on time. They will promise you the world and deliver you nothing. I had a big job ahead of me to try and get a police department started and only six months time to do it. It was a herculean task. I had no time to think, I just had to do it. It was a "doing" king of job at that print in time.

Although efficiency, hard work and determination were words used to describe Chief Nelson during those first six months, I did get a glimpse of the feeling of pride and accomplishment the Chief felt the night when the first official E.P.A. police cruisers hit the street.

NELSON: For me the greatest feeling was the night when we actually



East Palo Alto Police Chief Tecumseh Dan Nelson

put the police department on the streets which was July 1st, 1985. I had a great sense of pride as I watched those guys get into their uniforms and 'saddle-up!'

As the brand new police cars rolled out of the lot and we took to the street I watched citizens who stood on the streets and applauded the vehicles as they rolled out. It was just something that goes through you. It was electric it was a feeling that you get only a few times in life. It was like the birth of your first child.

However that was 1985 and the Chief had to quickly come to the reality of operating in an area with a large percentage of drug-related crime and unemployment. The Chief admits that the attitudes of some of the young offenders he sees on a daily basis are truly perplexing. The chief feels that over the years, young people today have lost in many respects the value in human life.

NELSON: The one thing that be devils me is the drug use of the black male in particular and the (high) homicide rate. They're inter-related. At this point I wouldn't say that one was necessarily caused by the other, but they're certainly related.

I think the increasing homicide rate in America has a myriad of causes. Number one is the lack of self-esteem that the black people, we, seem to have; the lack of caring. Somewhere down the line I have watched the fabric of the black community come apart; unravel.

I have also seen not only in the black community but in the general community as a whole, the value of life decline. To give you an example when I was a kid in Chicago there were gangs of course, not like today but there were gangs. I was always a member in some gang whether it was for sports or protec-

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Delta Sigma Theta Sorority

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, San Jose Alumnae will launch School America at various branch libraries. In partnership with prominent local organizations, School America promises to be an innovative program. Activities focus around registering readers. A registered reader is anyone who pledges to read to a child, age 1 through 10, one story a week throughout the sorority year September/1990 - June/1991.

Reader Registration Cards are available at the San Jose Main Branch 277-5700, or any of the branch libraries listed below.

For more information on SCHOOL AMERICA or how to become a registered reader, contact:

SCHOOL AMERICAN
(408) 281-1774

SCHOOL AMERICA(Trademark) in the Santa County area will consist of the following activities:

Activities	Date	Time	Branch Location
Halloween Party Reading Hour/Readers Registration Drive	10/31/90	7:00-9:00	Afro American Center
Reading Hour/ Readers Registration Drive	11/28/90	6:30-7:30	Educational Park
Reading Hour/ Readers Registration Drive	1/31/91	6:30-7:30	Empire
Reading Hour/ Readers Registration Drive	2/28/91	6:30-7:30	Seven Trees
Reading Hour/ Readers Registration Drive	3/28/91	6:30-7:30	E. San Jose Carnegie
Reading Hour/ Readers Registration Drive	4/25/91	6:30-7:30	Hillview
Reading Hour/ Readers Registration Drive	5/29/91	6:30-7:30	Santa Teresa