

Coffee with a Cop in Evansville, Indiana

Voiceover

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This is *The Beat*—a podcast series that keeps you in the know about the latest community policing topics facing our nation.

Tawana Waugh

00:08

This is Tawana Waugh with the U.S. Department of Justice, COPS Office. With us today is Chief Billy Bolin of the Evansville, Indiana, Police Department. We have a few questions for Chief Bolin today on implementing Coffee with Cop programs. Can you describe Coffee with a Cop in Evansville, sir?

Chief Billy Bolin

00:27

It's been a great addition for us, for the police department, in honing our message with the community and showing them that we're willing to work with them and be a part of the community. The citizens have really latched onto it. Kind of like the initial flyer that I had seen, we don't have an agenda, we just show up—we'll have several of us. When people are coming in, having a coffee, getting a doughnut, or whatever, we sit and talk about the weather, or life, or just anything they want to talk about. It's really brought a lot of good publicity and, I think, just good feeling from the community towards what we're trying to do.

Waugh

01:01

How would you describe your police-citizen relationships now that you have built a Coffee with a Cop program?

Bolin

01:08

I think it's been great. Like I was saying, the community seems to love it. They love the idea, the concept of it. I get, all the time, people who haven't even been to one will make comments to me about how much they love the program. "Oh, when did you come out?" I'll ask them. They'll say, "Oh I haven't gotten to come to one yet but I've been meaning to. I read about it in the paper and it's such a great idea."

I think, even the people who aren't coming, they like that the police are showing that they're willing to interact with people, that we want people asking questions, that we want to meet people. Of course the people who come out like it, they get a kick out of it. We've even developed some regular followers who come out every month.

Waugh

01:50

What were, sort of, your challenges with starting this program and how did you overcome those challenges?

Bolin

01:56

We didn't really have any challenges. I had found a card at the COPS booth at the Chiefs' Conference is where I got the idea. When I got back to Evansville I talked to my assistant chief and I said, "Yeah this may be a good idea. We could get a local business to partner with us."

We have a locally-owned place—The Doughnut Bank—that has about 10 locations in our area. We went and met with the ownership. We thought about it, and we said, "Doughnut Bank," you know you've got the joke between cops and doughnuts. We thought, you know, we'll play off that and we'll make fun of ourselves. The Doughnut Bank hopped right on board and said, "Yeah, we'd love to do this." They provide free coffee for invited customers in the restaurants on the mornings we're there.

We do it one day a month, the third Tuesday of every month. In the summer we did some Saturdays where we mixed it up a little bit. We've not had any obstacles at all. It's been a very easy event to organize. One of our local radio stations has come to every single one of them. They broadcast live. We didn't even ask them to do this. The first one we got coverage from all of our TV stations, several of our radio stations, and one of them just said, "We want to be a part of this every month."

Waugh

03:05

That's interesting and it's also a great story. What advice would you give to other chiefs about starting Coffee with a Cop programs in their jurisdictions?

Bolin

03:13

I'd say kind of like the old Nike commercials—"Just Do It." [Laughter] It takes very little work. Even if you don't have a doughnut shop, everybody's got a McDonald's or a gas station or somewhere. Go ahead and ask, "Do you care if we're hanging out here for one day a month or one day a quarter?" or however you want to do it. Just let the people come out and talk to you.

It's basically what we do anyway. Officers are in the car. They stop at the gas stations. It's letting the public know that you are approachable and that you do want to talk to them and not having that typical standoffish that a lot of the community perceives, I guess, is that we don't want to speak with them.

By putting this out there, I've heard from our officers that a lot of times people come up to them when they're out in different places and want to ask questions or ask about Coffee with a Cop. It's very simple. I think anybody in our job should be trying to do this.

Waugh

04:08

How did you select this site? Was it a central location where a lot of people go? Was it a popular spot for the officers? How did you come up with this particular location that you chose to implement the Coffee with a Cop program?

Bolin

04:24

Ours actually, the Doughnut Bank that I mentioned, they have several locations all around town. We don't do it at a set location every month. We have two locations that are predominantly inner city areas. We've got one out on the east side of town, two on the north side of town, and one on our far west side that are within the city limits. Each month we just pick a different location. We advertise it on our social media—Twitter, Facebook—and we do a news release, and the news has been really good about covering where we're going to be each month.

This month we're actually doing something completely different, that we've never done. We're not advertising until the day we do it. We're going to have our Coffee with a Cop at a homeless shelter. We're not going to invite the general public; it's just going to be for the people at the shelter. The Doughnut Bank is actually going to provide coffee and doughnuts and take them to the site for us.

Waugh

05:17

Where can listeners go to learn more about your Coffee with a Cop program?

Bolin

05:21

We have an Evansville Police Department Facebook page and we also have an Evansville Police Department website. Our Facebook page would be the best location. We update that regularly, every month. We update where we're going to be and we'll put pictures of that month's event. Sometimes we don't get the pictures uploaded afterwards but we always promote it on there.

Waugh

05:41

Thank you very much for taking the time to discuss your successful Coffee with a Cop program in Evansville, Indiana, sir.

Bolin

05:49

Thank you.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

05:50

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Voiceover: Disclaimer

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