

Stemming the Nightlife Crisis: Learning from the Arlington (Virginia) Police Department

Voiceover

00:00

Welcome to *The Beat*—a podcast series from the COPS Office at the Department of Justice. Featuring interviews with experts from a varied field of disciplines, *The Beat* provides law enforcement with the latest developments and trending topics in community policing.

Jennifer Donelan

00:16

Hello everyone and welcome to *The Beat*. I'm Jennifer Donelan. Today, we are going to be discussing the Arlington Restaurant Initiative and joining me is Master Police Officer, Demetrius Mastoras. And I have to make sure I get that name right, or people are going to call in, if that was even possible. Master Police Officer Mastoras, thank you so much for joining us.

Master Police Officer Demetrius Mastoras

00:34

Thank you for having me.

Donelan

00:36

And I got that right?

Mastoras

00:37

You sure did.

Donelan

00:38

Absolutely. Okay, great.

Mastoras

00:39

It was great. It was perfect.

Donelan

00:41

Thank you so much. All right. Let's talk about the Arlington Restaurant Initiative. This was started as a means to proactively address the underlying issues of alcohol-related harm and disorder in the Clarendon nightlife district of Arlington, Virginia. Now, the Clarendon neighborhood is a mixed residential and commercial area. It's home to many of the Washington D.C. metropolitan region's most

popular restaurants and pubs. It's estimated that anywhere between 5,500 and 7,000 patrons visit Clarendon every Friday and Saturday night so it's quite busy, very popular. And the nightlife scene in Clarendon has been growing, and as it grew, Arlington County Police had to get creative with their strategies, and this is what they came up with.

Before we go on, I think it's really important that I mention that the Arlington County Police Department entered into a partnership with the COPS Office to bring attention to these new, innovative practices, which we're going to get to in just a moment, and that they've shared this Restaurant Initiative, actually, as part of a toolkit. It's a toolkit for the COPS Office and the toolkit is available on the COPS website. So that the lessons learned by the Arlington County Police Department can benefit other law enforcement agencies that may be interested in establishing a similar initiative. And I'm always a fan of learning from other people so that I don't have to go through those mistakes and growing pains, quite frankly, right?

Mastoras

02:02

Right, right.

Donelan

02:03

So, let's set the scene. Describe for our listeners Clarendon, Virginia. This is nightlife in a compact area.

Mastoras

02:12

That's right. So, Clarendon is a neighborhood. It's an area within the county. It's a six- to eight-block area of... you have a mix of residential, commercial, and businesses such as restaurants. During the day, we have a lot of government workers, a vibrant food scene, and a lot of office workers, but once the sun goes down and happy hour starts, a lot of these restaurants turn into nightlife establishments, or traditional nightlife establishments. Meaning they remove their furniture and allow for more capacity and their main goal is to serve an increase in alcohol during those times. So, five to seven, we start seeing the influx on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, like most jurisdictions. And then, after nine or ten o'clock, you know, we start seeing max capacities where people are coming in the door one for one.

We have roughly between—at this point—16 to 18 restaurants that are continuously engaged in nightlife and when we say that, we mean they operate between 9 p.m. and 3 a.m., have an alcohol license where they serve a large amount, or a large portion of alcohol during that time, and have a live entertainment permit through the county so they're able to run bands or have a DJ.

Donelan

03:26

16 to 18 nightlife establishments in a six- to eight-block radius.

Mastoras

03:31

Right. And it can... it fluctuates, you know, week to week. You have some restaurants that will focus in on one specific day, on one, only on Saturday nights. Like, for instance, the Clarendon Ballroom, you know, they do a lot of catering. So, some nights they're open and they're packed because they have live entertainment, but other nights they're closed for a venue, for an event.

Donelan

03:52

And we're not talking about the Baby Boomers?

Mastoras

03:55

We're not talking about the Baby... no.

Donelan

03:56

We are talking about the freshly 21.

Mastoras

03:58

We're talking... that's right. We're talking the right of passage. Either just turned 21 and you look at that crowd it's... we expect it to be between 21 and 25, but we do see a lot of people who are underage. And because of the work we've done, a lot more of them are being identified and never have a chance to come in and cause any real harm to themselves.

Donelan

04:19

Let's start with you. How long have you been a police officer?

Mastoras

04:25

I've been a police officer for 22 years in Arlington County, spent a majority of my career working the road. Working, actually, I've been a field training officer and certified instructor through the state and most of my time has been spent on the midnight patrol so I've watched Arlington County grow, I've watched nightlife grow from its infancy back in the late 90s, early 2000s. That being said, the amount of resources and the amount of time that we spend has grown every single year and it got to a tipping point where we knew something had to change. It's funny how we met and how this project began because it was through a COPS Office initiative, which is Coffee with a Cop, that I happened to meet a staff from the COPS Office who said, "What do you do?" and, you know, "What are you involved in?" And I just said, "We just started this brand new program that I've been given autonomy to create from Chief Jay Farr," and he said, "Run with it."

Donelan

05:16

So you work the midnight shift. Midnight's where all the action is, we all know that. Sounds to me like you were spending a lot of time on midnight shifts in that nightlife area.

Mastoras

05:26

Right. We saw a high level of alcohol-related harms, specifically violence attached to that. We were... you know, malicious woundings. We saw assault by mob. There were nights I can remember where we had 20, 30 people fighting in the Clarendon park area at closing time. We would swamp the area. We did not have the assets. We did not have the resources available to staff this on a regular basis, and here we were, just trying to figure out, you know, best we could every single night. We dreaded it. When dealing with the restaurants we would make, you know, some of the suggestions. We'd say, "We need you to change this, or we need you to change that," but there was no incentive on the restaurant's part to change because we did not have devoted resources to help them.

Donelan

06:11

So you don't have devoted resources to that, for that.

Mastoras

06:14

And our answer was enforcement.

Donelan

06:15

Your answer had to be enforcement because the bad things were happening right in front of you and you had to respond to it.

Mastoras

06:19

That's right. So, meeting that safety component first and essentially restoring order. But the other part of that was we had the community policing teams that were overwhelmed. So in 2013, 2014, then Captain Penn, now Deputy Chief Andy Penn, put community policing officers there as part of their regular shift on the weekend and said, you know, "We want you to just keep an eye." They started providing some basic level responsible alcohol service, but because of the nature of our profession people don't stay in units, they don't stay in assignments too long. And just as you start to get to know people, off you go to the next assignment, right? You... they get promoted or you want to go to the next unit and all those relationships, all that work essentially, is completely removed and you're starting over. You're starting from scratch.

The next community policing officer's coming in. "Hi, I'm Jim. I want to, you know, work with you." Why do I want to work with you if I'm a restaurant owner, or a manager, or security. There's no opportunity for trust to be built and that's where I saw an opportunity because we were tired. We were staffing in the summer of 2015, we were staffing on Friday and Saturday nights, 20 officers down there a night.

Donelan

07:29

Let's paint the picture of Clarendon. How many bars, roughly, in what sort of concentrated area?

Mastoras

07:35

So we're talking a six- to eight-block area and, at that point, we were roughly between 13 and 16 restaurants that were routinely participating in nightlife. And when I say that, I mean they were operating between nine and three, they have live entertainment, they were moving furniture to allow maximum capacity to come in, and they're serving a high level of alcohol. That's their goal between 9 p.m. and 2 a.m. when they close or 1:30 or 1:45 for last call. The majority of their sales are coming from alcohol. We see a lot of restaurants that are trying to make up that difference by serving brunch on Sundays to make up their food ratios. So, you know, you have that many restaurants that are now participating. We watched this grow from, like I said, the late 90s when you had maybe two or three restaurants in Clarendon. It was Clarendon Grill, you had Clarendon Ballroom, you had Mr. Days that started when they came over from D.C., and that was really it. We showed up at closing time. Everyone went home. Not too many problems. When you start adding 10, 12, 13 restaurants that are participating in that level of service to that many people, it's a recipe for disaster. And then on top of it, we had no coordinated response. We were just winging it.

Donelan

08:34

The clientele, too, was pretty specific too. Because you had a very young clientele.

Mastoras

08:49

That's right.

Donelan

08:49

You didn't have the 30- or 40-somethings coming there. You had the 21, "I just got my legal age limit driver's license. I'm coming in. I'm drinking legally and I'm drinking a lot of alcohol." And there were just tons of them. So to have what, 13 to 16 bars in six to eight blocks with 20 officers on a Friday night and a Saturday night completely dedicated to that in a city that's how large? What's your service area?

Mastoras

09:15

So the county is 26 square miles. We have a population of just over 250,000 that swells during the week. With all the federal government, we can get as high as 350- 400,000 but we have... At that point, I think we were roughly at 319 or 320 sworn.

Donelan

09:31

And 20 of those officers are...

Mastoras

09:33

That's right.

Donelan

09:33

Directly just focused on...

Mastoras

09:34

And those were being incrementally added. I mean, when you talk about 21 year olds, we had a lot of underage drinking going on as well. Because of the fake IDs, it was rampant. We... I kind of talk about Clarendon pre... up until 2015, 2016 as kind of being the Wild West. It was just anything goes. Anything goes because, frankly, we didn't know what we were doing, other than just responding to a symptom. So we got to the point where officers were fatigued. After the summer of 2015, heading into the fall and then finally a winter of 2016, January, February, officers were done. Our overtime detail for Clarendon was being staffed primarily by overtime officers. So if nobody signs up, then no one works it.

You're guaranteed, almost guaranteed, an arrest when working the Clarendon detail. You are guaranteed to have to take care of you. You know, we had a community caretaker. We do not want to arrest people for drunk in public. It's the last thing we want to do. I don't want to now babysit somebody who cannot take care of themselves because of intoxication for the next two to three hours and sometimes longer. That being said, we try everything we possibly can to get them to move along. "Please get into a taxi." You know, have... implore friends to take them. "We beg you." Some people just refuse, they flat out refuse.

So there was... it was a bad feeling about Clarendon by the officers. It was a bad feeling about the way the owners and the managers saw the officers' response, which is enforcing... "You're not helping us. You're not doing anything other than coming and locking up our patrons. Why would we work with you?" You know?

Donelan

11:04

And I'm sure you had community members who were wanting something to happen there.

Mastoras

11:08

That's right.

Donelan

11:09

I know that our listeners... There are agencies across this country who deal with college towns, they've got the college bars, but every area has its little nightlife-scene area. Whether it's even just a strip mall with a popular bar that everyone goes to, and so, I know a lot of people can relate to what you're talking about. Officer fatigue. Officers not even wanting to sign up for that

Mastoras

11:30

Right.

Donelan

11:30

Overtime. Having to do just response, not really doing anything proactive, simply reactive. So, you say "Enough is enough." What's the first step?

Mastoras

11:38

The first thing that I recognized was that we were simply... the way I saw it, 21 and 22 year olds were the last step of the ladder. It was the symptom. We were simply putting... we'd bring the wagon in, three people would get arrested, they'd load them up, and we'd just repeat this time after time. I started looking at some of the projects that were going on worldwide and the one that kept coming up was Best Bar None in the UK. This was a program that had been in place, at this point, for 11, 12 years and it was a voluntary program. And so I drew up a proposal and I said, "We need to start making some in-roads with the restaurants, with the managers and staff. We have no dedicated resources. This does not fall into the community policing unit's mission. This needs to be a standalone position." And I brought that to Deputy Chief Penn who, at that point, [laughs] you know, he was ready to listen to anything. He saw the value in it and allowed me to try it out for six months. So they pulled me off of the street and said, "See what you can do."

Donelan

12:40

And what was the basis behind that program?

Mastoras

12:42

The Best Bar None model is a voluntary accreditation model where businesses allow their staff to be trained in responsible alcohol service. Their responsible alcohol service, public safety expectations, they had some training in fake ID detection, and they put policies in place in their handbooks to receive this accreditation. So they have to go through the training, but they also have to have policies on the books either incorporated into their employee handbooks or as a standalone guide. In addition to that, because it was in the UK, it all falls under the Home Office, so they essentially had federal support. They also partner up with the distributors and distillers and they had this huge awards banquet and they would be promoted. The businesses would be promoted for being part of this safety scheme.

And obviously, I saw that we couldn't, we couldn't partner up with distributors and distillers, it might be a conflict of interest, but we do have the Office of Economic Development in the county. We also have the Chamber of Commerce, both are meant to, you know, promote businesses that are doing well and I saw it as perfect opportunity to allow businesses to be promoted by someone other than the police department. So, I made just as many relationships in the beginning with the owners and managers. I wore them out. They were sick of me, some two, three times a week even. I just wanted them to see that I was going to be a consistent person in their lives.

Donelan

14:04

Let me stop you there. Let's talk about those owners and managers. When you bring in this idea about voluntary responsibility and take part in this training and "Hey, let's clean up the streets" and that's their money maker...

Mastoras

14:18

Right.

Donelan

14:18

That's their money making crowd....

Mastoras

14:18

That's right.

Donelan

14:20

And you're the police. How did that go over with them?

Mastoras

14:23

It took a long time. It really did. I mean this is not something that you can just put in place. You can't look at the toolkit and say, "All right. Well, next week we're going to have an accreditation model in place." For the same time that it took me to build these relationships, which were six months to a year with the owners and managers, I started putting things in place, like training the security staff. Underage drinking was a huge problem. In the last two years, we've had over 2,000 fake IDs detected in Clarendon alone, and that's not by the cops. That's...

Donelan

14:54

And that's Clarendon?

Mastoras

14:56

That's right. You're talking about a small area, a small number of restaurants, right, where concentrated drinking goes on, right? And nightlife. But, just in this small area, over 2,000 fake IDs have been detected and turned in to the police department. So we empower them. We empower them to take a stand and what I'm constantly preaching with them is: We will support and guide you. We want you to be the ones to say, "We're not serving underage. We're not going to serve you when you're over intoxicated. We're not going to serve you if it's going to put our business at risk." So, getting them to understand that first of all, we're not coming in with enforcement first. We want you to understand that we care about your business, and further, if you put these safety methods in place, these standards, perhaps your business might be more economically viable. And that was the case that Economic Development and the Chamber made for them.

And they're like, "Oh, well at this point, if I just put some basic standards... I have none right now. We just wing it day to day. We just hope, you know, we're just going to be okay. None of my staff is required to responsible alcohol service by the state." So, we started talking to them about reasonable effort. What are you going to do if...? You know like, "Well, you know, we've been bartenders for 30 years" or "We've been bartenders for 15 years. We know what to do." Oh okay, well can you tell me what the acceptable identifications are in the state of Virginia. "A driver's license." Okay, that's it? That's all you got? No, there are specific IDs and if you serve somebody that's underage and you didn't use one of the accepted IDs, that's an ABC violation against your business now.

Just having a little bit of information can empower you to do the right thing. You comply with the law, but guess what? You're going to be safer if you're doing things in a better way. You're going to need us less. You might need my attention, specifically, as the Restaurant Liaison Officer, but you're going to have fewer calls for service. You're going to have fewer calls for service that require us to take action. We've watched our contacts. I don't judge, and that was the other piece. I told them when, when the county board reviews your Live Entertainment permit, we're not going to hold calls for service against you anymore because what we want is a high level of engagement from you. We want you to call us and allow these officers... So, I had to train all the nightlife officers as well in the expectations.

This is what the businesses are going to be asking of you now. You... we have to go in to do ID checks when they pull them aside and say, "Officer, I need you to come check this ID because we've identified something in this ID from our training that indicates that it's a fake ID." So it was engagements. We look at the contacts. So for the year of 2018, we had over 19,000 police contacts down there between 9 p.m. and 2 a.m.

Donelan

17:40

Again, in what block radius?

Mastoras

17:42

Six to eight blocks.

Donelan

17:42

19,000.

Mastoras

17:44

19,000 police contacts. And that means a drunk walking down the street and you guide them into a cab or an Uber. Maybe that's breaking up a fight. Maybe that's an ID check. Maybe that's a walk through at the bar. There's so much work that we do that we never took credit for and, you know, didn't serve a purpose. If we're going to have a relationship, this needs to be a mutually beneficial relationship. And that's what I've been trying to express to the owners, and the managers, and the staff. They all have my phone number. I'm here to help you if it's two o'clock in the morning or two o'clock in the afternoon. I mean, that's what I accepted when I took this job. You have to make yourself available. You have to allow them to get to know you as a person and then you're starting off. I'm not coming in to judge you. I'm always going to be here to help you. If you have violations, they're going to be dealt with. I'm not going to play the gotcha game. I'm not going to come here and try to catch you doing things.

If I walk into the restaurant and I see there is a violation, I'm going to say, "Joe, the manager, I need you to take care of this." And they're going to go, "Jim, of course I will."

Donelan

18:50

If I was a business owner or a manager listening to this...

Mastoras

18:53

Mm-hmm [affirmative]

Donelan

18:54

And it seems like that's just the challenge, getting them to listen, because once you started talking and explaining this, this seems to be, to me, if I'm a bar owner or manager, this seems like a no brainer.

Mastoras

19:03

It is a no brainer.

Donelan

19:04

So we know the benefits for the bar owners and the managers, once you get them to listen. What was the benefit for the Arlington County Police Department?

Mastoras

19:12

We saw a drop in violence. That's what we saw. Alcohol-related violence has dropped. So, we partnered up with... at the time we started the MOU with Virginia Tech.

Donelan

19:24

So you partnered with a local university?

Mastoras

19:26

We partnered with Virginia Tech to evaluate and conduct a social and economic impact study for us. What we wanted to see was the benefits to not only the community, the government, and the businesses. And those are essentially the three stakeholders, right? We all have equal parts in this. We all have equal footing and that's the other piece that, you talked about that earlier with the community. We have... we went from four meetings, community meetings, per year, which were required by the county board. I've gotten those down to two and the reason being is community members are not showing up to these meetings anymore to complain. They're not talking about the drunk that's passed out in their bushes or trying to enter their home or urinating in public in front of... They're just not seeing... we're not seeing those issues anymore because we have such a high level of involvement.

On the other side, I had to build these relationships with the county, with the Fire Marshal's office, Public Health, Code Enforcement, the Site Planners, everyone that issues... County Manager's office—none of these relationships existed. We all operated independently within our own little worlds. No one spoke to each other. Apparently years ago we used to do some sort of task force with the ABC where we would go out and right a bunch of summonses and violations and the owners really appreciated that, I'm sure. But now we have a concerted effort to work together and make recommendations for the businesses. So we do a weekly, what we call the Weekly ARI Report. All activity goes to all the county agencies that have a vested interest in the restaurants. So, if we walk in—and we have a little bit of

training now—if I walk in and see a contaminated kitchen, Public Health knows about it and they take action immediately. If I walk in and see egress issues, like boxes loaded up in the back kitchen area where all that kitchen staff is. If there's a fire or something bad that happens, they need to exit out of that door, notoriously it happens. They've... boxes are piled to the roof and I'll come in and say, "That's an egress issue" and I will just take care of it.

Donelan

21:27

That sounds like it's making everything across the board better, right?

Mastoras

21:31

That's right.

Donelan

21:31

So before, if you saw the Fire Inspector coming, you got the boxes taken care of but you didn't worry about it if you saw the police coming because “why do I have to worry about fire code because it's the police officer.”

Mastoras

21:41

That's right.

Donelan

21:42

Now they see you, they're taking care of everything, which means a safer environment for everyone involved.

Mastoras

21:45

That's right.

Mastoras

21:46

And because we've provided this training... so we have a group of ARI assessor's, which are police officers and fire marshals who have been cross trained in each other's skill set. I am not a fire Marshal, I am not going to go in and write a violation. However, I can see issues. If I walk in and I see the hood's not been inspected, you know, that's a classic issue that causes fires within a restaurant. We've had three of them, I think, in the past year and a half, just in Clarendon alone, from hood fires.

Donelan

22:13

I was going to say, hood fires, head lamp... everything you're saying, these are all possible headline-grabbing events...

Mastoras

22:18

That's right.

Donelan

22:18

Fires...

Mastoras

22:18

Yep, absolutely.

Donelan

22:20

People getting underage drinking and driving, fatalities, big fights, all of that is not the kind of news any kind of community wants. And here you have this really nice framework to try and make it all better. So you did the hard work, the blood, sweat, and tears...

Mastoras

22:37

Yeah.

Donelan

22:37

To make this all come. I'm sure there were bumps along the way.

Mastoras

22:40

Sure.

Donelan

22:40

It's modeled after this program in the UK, but you made it work for Arlington County. And, we talked about this in the beginning, you are now sharing that knowledge...

Mastoras

22:50

That's right.

Donelan

22:50

With the rest of the country.

Mastoras

22:51

So in the same way that David Young from Best Bar None Canada shared with me all of their policies and standards, just the same way that National Coordinator Mick McDonald from the UK shared, we felt we owed it. Chief Jay Farr said, "We are going to pay this forward" and I firmly believe that if... We need to make this available to other jurisdictions if they have a nightlife or restaurant scene. And that was the thing. Like, we started in Clarendon, it was the Clarendon Detail, we now have a nightlife detail in Ballston. We're staffing officers there.

Donelan

23:20

Ballston is another city in Arlington County.

Mastoras

23:23

That's right. Another area of the county. And we have Crystal City as well, where Amazon just secured HQ2. Guess what? We are positive we're going to have a nightlife presence down there within the next three to four years. Well, we know how to deal with it now. We know what to expect from the business and we're using Clarendon as... we talk about the little birdie that flew away from the nest. Like, we don't worry about Clarendon the way we used to because we know we have these connections. I don't have to make a weekly visit down there anymore. Sometimes I can go two weeks, but I'm constantly checking in with the owners, with the heads of security, with some of the bar managers. This cost... because they know me so well, that's allowed me to have a little bit of... I'm putting them at arm's length, because I trust them now. I trust that they're going to do the right thing.

We have two businesses, just in the past week, that have reached their one-year anniversary for their ARI accreditation. So, putting the standards in place, that's what they had to do. They had to show us that they wrote policies to meet our standards. They have to allow us to come in and do an operational walk through to check all of the fire and public health codes. This is on top of their annual inspections. And then, they had to allow us to come in and do a full two-hour training. That's the responsible alcohol service. We now have the Commonwealth Attorney's Office. Victim Witness Office gives them sexual assault intervention training. We have the Ask for Angela program, another UK import from Hailey Child in the UK. We asked her, "Can we use your program?" That's the...

Donelan

24:52

Which is?

Mastoras

24:53

The patron safety program Ask for Angela? Essentially they put up posters and if you're feeling uncomfortable, you're on a bad date, whatever it is that you need an out. If you're being harassed, you're having a domestic, whatever it is, you can walk up to staff and say, "Is Angela working?" That's their cue to bring you into the back and say, "What do you need? What can we do? Where can we get you? Is it a cab? Is it the police? What is it?" So to have the relationships in place has sprouted so many other initiatives. We're right on the heels of... Oh, that's right, the CPR training, as well. That's another one. We have Hands to Heart, which is a partnership between VHC, Virginia Hospital Center, and our fire department. In this two-hour training, they get all the alcohol liability training from us. They get CPR, and that's already been... that's hands-only CPR. They literally learn it in ten minutes and we have staff who have already used it. And then we have the Sexual Assault Intervention training.

Donelan

25:51

In two hours.

Mastoras

25:51

In two hours.

Donelan

25:52

They walk out that empowered.

Mastoras

25:54

That's right. And this is not a check-the-box kind of day. We want you to change your behavior, starting from your first shift. We have restaurants, the smallest of restaurants who have a staff of five or six, their liability is just the same as a restaurant that has a staff of 30 and has, you know, 1,500 people that come in the door. Maybe they only have 60 people that come in the door, but their liability is the same. So this program is scalable, that's the beauty of it. If you're Chipotle even, you're serving alcohol. You can benefit from this.

Donelan

26:27

How can you get accredited? Who does the accrediting? It's all Arlington County Police?

Mastoras

26:31

It's Arlington County Police and the Fire Marshal's Office and Deputy Fire Marshals that are trained as Arlington Restaurant Initiative Assessors. They will get the request either from the restaurant or we get referrals. We get referrals from management at Ballston Quarter. Ballston Quarter's where Ballston Mall

used to be. They went through a full reno and they have this huge food hall now and a lot of restaurants and they really want to be the next Clarendon. So they're recommending as part of their introductory packet that, here's the ARI program. We have our ABC agents that are making recommendations. The ABC agents that work in Arlington are saying, "Hey, we just did this inspection. Do you know about ARI?" and they're handing out pamphlets and cards for us.

Donelan

27:14

We know that the law enforcement side of this loves this. Less violence...

Mastoras

27:19

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Donelan

27:19

You're no longer worried about certain locations as you used to be. We know that we've got the buy in now from the business side of it, the managers, the owners. What about the people that go there and drink and hang out and eat? The patrons. Do they like it?

Mastoras

27:34

They do. And how do we know that? Well we do a lot of outreach with this unit. On August 29th of this year we're going to be having an outreach event called Conversation with a Cop and what we do is we visit two ARI—Arlington Restaurant Initiative—accredited restaurants and we go and speak to people during Happy Hour. And we have a list of the ARI, or the ARI assessors have a list of questions that we want to know. Do you feel safe in Clarendon? Do you visit nightlife? What is your opinion of the restaurants that are accredited? What is your opinion of the staff? What is your opinion of the security staff? What is your opinion of the officers? Are there things that could be done better? We want to hear all that and the... when we started doing this, we used to hear a lot of "Why are there so many officers working?"

Donelan

28:30

I was wondering.

Mastoras

28:31

Right?

Donelan

28:31

Are you clearing rooms when you walk into a bar?

Mastoras

28:33

That's... yeah. Why are so many officers working the Clarendon area? I told you we went from 20. We now operate Clarendon with eight officers. We have two in Ballston and one supervisor. So, the fact... and like I said, I'm not going to be budgeted any more money, I think, at this point, to continue to grow this. I hope we would but we're going to have to make do with what we have. So I have 12 spots I can fill. One supervisor and 11 officers. We're going to start pulling from that, from the Clarendon detail, to put them down in Crystal City once that gets going.

And we went from "Why are there so many officers?" to "Of course the police are here." We are counted on. When we're not there, I start getting calls and texts from owners saying, "Your guys aren't here." So we have some guys who work, perhaps they're working evening shift 1-11. They'll work a half shift for the nightlife detail. And maybe they were on a late call or something happened, and they got there a little late. So the owners depend on us so much, the patrons depend on us because, again, we provided a level of training to the officers that says, "We want engagement." If somebody wants to come over and shake your hand, shake their hand. They want a fist bump? They want a picture with you? As long as it's not inappropriate it, have at it.

Donelan

29:37

And that...

Mastoras

29:38

There's no harm in this.

Donelan

29:40

And in this day and age...

Mastoras

29:41

Yeah.

Donelan

29:41

With tensions the way they are...

Mastoras

29:42

Yeah, yep.

Donelan

29:44

And as you know, the negative sort of image that law enforcement often faces on a day-to-day basis and the challenges in erasing that disconnect between community and law enforcement, that sounds amazing.

Mastoras

29:55

It's so easy to do. It costs us nothing, right? And we have one officer who has spent his career... he's detailed oriented, let's just put it that way. He knew how to write a summons. He knew how to write a ticket. He routinely works the Clarendon detail that has become the nightlife detail and very [laughs]

Donelan

30:16

Straight laced?

Mastoras

30:17

Emotionless, yeah. And I watched somebody come over and ask him for a hug, and they got a hug. I almost fell over.

Donelan

30:24

Did you almost fall down?

Mastoras

30:25

I almost fell over. How I didn't have my phone out, I don't know, but those are the moments. And I turned and looked at him, and I'm like, "I can't, I can't believe you. I can't believe you. What did you just do?"

Donelan

30:33

His other side, yeah.

Mastoras

30:35

It's amazing.

Donelan

30:36

I mean, you've... there are so many markers here that I know that there are law enforcement out there listening to this saying, "I want that." Where can they learn about this toolkit?

Mastoras

30:46

Thanks for asking. So the toolkit will be available through the COPS Office. We will also have all of our standards, all of our resources, all of the research that I did to put many of these programs in place, are going to be available on our web page, as well. So, through the Arlington County Police Department, so under the Community Outreach or Community Resources section, the Arlington Restaurant Initiative can be found, as well as our Sober Ride program that we have with the Washington Regional Alcohol Program, RAP, and their partner, Lyft. We have the Sober Ride car. We include that in all our outreach events, which is a 2004 BMW and it was wrapped in pink colors of Lyft and it gets a lot of attention. They've outfitted it with the lights and the whole bit so we bring this out to the community. We're bringing it to the county fair here in the next week, go out to nightlife, go to the outreach events. Before people get intoxicated on some of the Sober Ride events on Saint Patrick's Day, Cinco de Mayo, July 4th, it's a way for us to engage with this community before they become intoxicated later in the night.

And we want them to remember that here, we're just trying to help you. We just want to be here to help you when, you know, things go bad at the end of the night.

Donelan

32:02

Exactly. Do you have a great story that you wouldn't have expected when you started along this journey?

Mastoras

32:08

Yeah, building relationships with owners takes time. I had one particular owner, who at the starting point has always been "no." No matter what I did, and he flat out told me—he's very honest, you have to give him that—"You're the government and I don't care what you're selling, it could be the best thing possible for me, I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to do it. And my staff's not going to do it. So, take that." And, the one thing I learned... I've been very lucky and this relationship-based approach is letting go of the rope. I do not get discouraged. I just don't take "no" for an answer. I wear them out, I really do and that's what I did with him.

And he told me, "You're going to be gone in six months like everyone else before you. Or two years. You'll be replaced or you'll be gone." Here I am, you know, three and a half years later. I plan on retiring in the next couple years, so I'm going to be here fix, six years. That's kind of extraordinary in their eyes. And so, he's not an active member of ARI; however, he's allowed his entire staff to do the training. He's incorporated the standards. He said he'll never check a fake ID from any of his patrons or allow any of his staff to do that, yet when we come around to collect any of the fake IDs from the previous week that have been collected, he has fake IDs.

So, he is participating, right? He's participating in all the tenets of the program, but guess what he doesn't have on the front of his door? He doesn't have a sticker.

Donelan

33:36

I was going to say. He doesn't have a sticker.

Mastoras

33:38

All right. Is that a win? In my eyes it is. I don't need him to be... he doesn't want to be recognized in this program for whatever reason. I don't have to understand it, but I respect it, right? And once you can stop trying to control, I mean, that's really what it comes down to. I knew from Day 1 I couldn't force my will on this person. And that's what I've learned. I don't force my will on anyone. You want to show me... I've had people... I've had owners kick me out of their restaurant, show me out the door. I have no legal reason to be there. So, you want me to leave, I'll leave, but I'm going to come knock on the door tomorrow and then they realize, that 'Oh.' Because I never start with "I'm Corporal Mastoras" or "I'm MPO Mastoras." I'm Jim. How you doing? Nice to meet you. Can I have just a few minutes of your time? Let's have a conversation. I'm here to help you.

Donelan

34:31

You mentioned ABC. What is ABC for our listeners?

Mastoras

34:34

Sure. It's the Virginia Alcohol Beverage Control authority. They're the agency that regulates and distributes all the alcohol here in the state. So you have to obtain an ABC license to serve as a license holder for on premise and off premise, as well as special events.

Donelan

34:50

So the business owners are really invested in keeping their ABC licenses?

Mastoras

34:55

That's their bread and butter. Without that ABC license, you know, then they're McDonald's so... yeah.

Donelan

35:01

All of this sounds truly fantastic and I know that there are going to be people chomping at the bit to learn more about the Arlington Restaurant Initiative so let's get them to the right places. Where can our listeners find out more about ARI?

Mastoras

35:16

Sure. All our standards, all our resource guides, and you can find out more about our partnerships through the Arlington Police web page and that is W-W-W-dot-P-O-L-I-C-E-dot-A-R-L-I-N-G-T-O-N-V-A-dot-U-S. [www.police.arlingtonva.us] That's police dot Arlington V-A dot U-S and if you look under the Crime Prevention and Safety Programs tab, you'll see all the safety programs that we have, including the Arlington Restaurant Initiative that I spoke about today, as well as the Sober Ride program through RAP.

Donelan

35:56

And Sober Ride is for people to get safe rides home if they're intoxicated?

Mastoras

36:00

That's exactly right.

Donelan

36:01

Beyond the legal limit.

Mastoras

36:02

That's right and that's available throughout the entire D.C. Metro region.

Donelan

36:05

And our listeners can also, because you've partnered with COPS, access the Arlington Restaurants Initiative Toolkit at the COPS Office website. And if anybody wants to actually reach out to you directly, beyond just reading about the resources on the COPS website under the Toolkit or the web address that you just gave us, how can they speak directly to someone involved with the program?

Mastoras

36:27

Sure. On our web page we do have an inbox and that's ARIrestaurant@arlingtonva.us. That's A-R-I-R-E-S-T-A-U-R-A-N-T-at-A-R-L-I-N-G-T-O-N-V-A-dot-U-S.

Donelan

36:46

Well, I think you should expect many emails coming your way.

Mastoras

36:50

We'd be happy to.

Donelan

36:51

Because this has been a phenomenal time speaking with you. I think this is a really exciting program and I think there's going to be a lot of interest about this from across the country.

We have been speaking with Master Police Officer Demetrius Mastoras of the Arlington County Police Department in Virginia.

Mastoras

37:08

That's right. Thank you very much. It was, it was a pleasure to be here. Thank you for having us.

Donelan

37:12

Thank you for joining us and thank you for listening to *The Beat*.

Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit

37:15

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38:12

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