

# The Power of Partnerships



## From the Sheriff's Desk

Sheriff  
John  
Rutherford

Since announcing Operation Safe Streets last month, I've spent a lot of time with citizens explaining this year's spike in murders and the overall crime picture in Jacksonville. I enjoy speaking with the neighbors we encounter on our walks, with civic and business leaders, the media, clergy members, and our ShAdCo members – any person or group that wants to better understand what might seem to be a confusing message.

When I say, "Today you are twice as safe in Jacksonville as you were 15 years ago," this is absolutely true. Then I mention that "if the current trend holds, we are on track for a record number of murders this year." How can that be? Isn't that a conflicting message?

Overall, in all the categories by which we are measured, in 2005 violent crimes were down in Jacksonville, as they have been

trending for the past 15 years. This is especially true when you adjust that rate for population growth.\*

However, 2006 began as though someone literally "flipped a switch" and the killings began. And since murder is the most heinous of all crimes, regardless of the circumstances surrounding it, it goes to the very core of how a community perceives itself.

While there is confusion and fear, I am also very encouraged. Look around at the community-based solutions being discussed concerning the murder problem. Especially in the prevention and intervention arena, so many programs and projects are germinating and coming to fruition. Look at the leadership being demonstrated by citizens and companies that never imagined they would play a role in changing the community.

People are starting to realize what we have been saying for years – that by *partnering* with each other, we can start to make systemic changes in the community. We must change our collective value system so that resolving conflict with violence and weapons is no longer accept-

able to any of us who call Jacksonville home – regardless of who we are or in which part of town we live. We have to make this our core belief, and instill it in every generation.

To make this point I refer

**"Today you are twice as safe in Jacksonville as you were 15 years ago."**

to the partnerships that we know work. And don't be surprised to learn that these are the same partnerships that are helping us create a downward trend in the crime rate:

### Operation Showdown.

This JSO initiative depends on its partnership with citizens in the affected neighborhood to "buy in" to our enforcement efforts surrounding guns, drugs and prostitution. We're invited into the neighborhood to curb these problems and force the criminal element out, and in return, we ask everyone who lives and works there to help

us by reporting the crime, to turn out the bad guys, call us EVERY SINGLE TIME there is a "flare up" or a problem. PARTNERSHIP.

This one is a bit more internal – but it's a very successful partnership: our **Violent Crimes Task Force**. It began as a "marriage" of a homicide unit with narcotics to focus on the drug-related murders and crime we knew were operating in our city. Today, two and one-half years later, and along with the help and partnership of other agencies, we've taken down eight major drug trafficking operations and put 170 people in jail, including individuals implicated in 42 murders. PARTNERSHIP.

**Watch Programs. ShAdCo.** Citizens who choose to come together, look out for each other's homes and property, and actively report unusual behavior or events to the police every time they happen. By cooperating with each other, and banding together to partner with law enforcement, they are creating a powerful force against crime.

Last of all, I look at the invaluable partnerships of the JSO with organizations in the

community, such as **CrimeStoppers** and the **Justice Coalition**. CrimeStoppers affords us the opportunity to reach people who are scared to work openly with the police. Concerned citizens can remain anonymous, even when they pick up the reward check at the bank. It is a way to help law enforcement without ever being known to anyone. And our true partner, the Justice Coalition, reminds all of us in the community that we cannot forget that behind every statistic, every number, and every crime is a *victim* whose rights must be protected and whose fight for justice is our common bond.

We can all do more to be a true partner to the city of Jacksonville. In addition to taking care of your own family, you might consider supporting one of the many non-profit organizations in our community that are reaching our youth and instilling solid values in them.

*\*For more in-depth information, please visit our website at [coj.net/sheriff](http://coj.net/sheriff) and view the *Murder in Jacksonville research document and the Operation Safe Streets overview.**

## In Ted's Own Words...ten years later



## In Ted's Own Words

by Ted  
Hires,  
Founder

*(Ted Hires founded the Justice Coalition in 1995 and the first issue of the Victims' Advocate hit the newsstands 10 years ago in March 1996. This editorial appeared in May 1996.)*

National Victims' Rights Week has just passed. Federal, State and Local governments (including Jacksonville) observe the week of April 21 through 26 to help bring the plight of innocent victims of crime to the forefront.

Very unusual, sometimes depressing, and mostly rewarding are terms I use to describe the past year for me. I became an innocent victim and got involved in our criminal justice system. Since then I

have seen things, heard things, and just come to know things that have shocked me almost beyond belief.

I have come face-to-face with a system that, for whatever reasons, is very dysfunctional and broken when it comes to victims.

As I asked questions and got involved, I came to the belief that all the emphasis and attention were directed toward the criminal. For the most part, innocent victims and their needs were forgotten.

As a businessman, I thought I understood the way things were. Boy, did I get surprised. At almost every turn I was amazed at the laws in existence that almost always worked to the benefit of the accused criminal.

Perhaps the biggest revelation that came to me was that I was part of the problem! Abraham Lincoln said, "We have the government we deserve." As a citizen of Jacksonville I had let my

government become a bureaucracy – a bureaucracy that was not responsive to the needs of law-abiding, tax-paying citizens like myself.

As victims, we went into the system one at a time and were lost in the shuffle. Many times, because a plea bargain was being negotiated, we weren't even involved because we weren't needed as witnesses. As victims, we were left out of the loop. The crimes weren't even committed against us – they were committed against the "State." This is how we had let our system evolve.

I realized that my apathy had contributed to the mess our system is in. I made a commitment to myself that I would no longer be part of the problem; instead, I would be part of the solution. I realized that if I was this ignorant about the system, then others must be also.

In some way the message had to be delivered, and I made the commitment to start

this paper to put out the truth in Jacksonville about our [criminal justice] system. I knew that the good people of our city would be affected the same way I was. Thankfully, I was right.

It is at times depressing to deal with all the hurt, destruction, despair and destroyed lives. But the inner fulfillment and peace that come from helping innocent victims of crime is the greatest thing I have ever experienced.

The theme of Victims' Rights Week was "Victim Justice – a New Day Dawns." Well, a new day as dawned in Jacksonville. Citizens are getting involved in court watches. I see more "I can make a difference" buttons every day, and people are starting to believe it. People are coming forward to help victims. People are starting to realize that if we, the taxpayers, don't [work to make a change], it won't get done.

In my reading I ran across a

quote from Margaret Meade that says, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

I personally believe these words to be true. Citizens of Jacksonville, please get involved. Make a difference. Please help us make Jacksonville the safest city in America.

"Together we can; together we will."

*These words and my beliefs are stronger ten years later than they were then. We definitely generated quite a bit of citizen involvement the first few years, but it saddens my heart that apathy seems to have taken over again. And until citizens realize their responsibility for crime in our community, I believe it will do nothing but get worse. Law enforcement cannot make a safe community – only citizens can.*

-Ted Hires