



Submitted In Consideration for the

**2007 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in  
Problem Solving Policing Submissions**

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Submitted by the:  
City of Jackson (Mississippi) Police Department  
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Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau

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# “TOPS”: TOURISM ORIENTED POLICING STRATEGIES

A collaboration of efforts by the Jackson Police Department, Jackson, MS & the Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau

**The Problem:** Increased crime rates at tourism based businesses in Jackson, MS, i.e., hotels, restaurants, museums, attraction venues and shopping areas.

**Analysis:** Crime rates were on a rise at local visitor industry businesses in Jackson, Mississippi. Car burglaries and break-ins, purse snatchings and strong arm robberies were being reported in the local media on a regular basis. Petty crimes spread like wildfire through heavy tourist areas of the city. Tourism-based businesses were so concerned about their own individual images that little if any communication or “warning” was shared with other businesses in the area. Both business and leisure travelers were using unsafe and careless practices, such as leaving packages on car seats and doors unlocked, leaving the car running at the hotel’s front door while checking in.

**Response:** Develop a program that would address the following strategies and tactics:

- Education
- Training
- Resources
- Relationship Building
- Awareness

**Assessment:** After the TOPS program was implemented, we were able to note marked strengthening of relationships between beat officers, business management and front line employees. Providing front-line staff with resources and training including “who to call” and “how to call” police and other emergency and first responders has been an invaluable asset. Bringing law enforcement personnel and programs of the agency together has improved relationships and encouraged each sector to depend upon one other for support and ultimately mutual success. Educating law enforcement on the vital role they play in successfully marketing the city as a convention, meeting and visitor destination has been a great success. Sworn officers now attend tourism industry functions and are now viewed as a partner rather than a symbol of some negative activity that has occurred. Officers participate in pre-conference planning to evaluate the needs of large convention groups to alleviate negative activity. Now when problems occur, the intelligence is shared by neighboring industry businesses, private security personnel and the appropriate law enforcement jurisdiction. This is due to successful relationship building and education.

## Scanning

Jackson, the capital city of the State of Mississippi, is situated at the crossroad of Interstates 55 and 20, *the crossroads of the South*; and has a city population of slightly fewer than 180,000 and a metropolitan population of over 560,000. The city is the governmental, cultural and medical hub of

the state impacting the economy of the area by contributing significant tax revenue through destination marketing efforts. In 2006, the Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau reported that over 3.3 million visitors came to Jackson, Mississippi spending \$378,000,000, and creating 24,000 jobs and an annual payroll of over \$489,000,000. In early 2006, the city opened a state-of-the art telecommunications and conference center that will be attached to the Capital City Convention Center currently under construction. In short the city's economic development and tourism business is growing.<sup>2</sup>

In 2003, the city began experiencing an increase in its crime rate. The mostly petty crimes were occurring at visitor-based businesses in the city, museums and other attractions, hotels and restaurant parking lots. The hotel and lodging community, known for their reluctance to share information because of the competitive nature of their business, were experiencing the brunt of the exposure. Car burglaries, shattered glass of automobiles, and simple assaults were the majority of the incidents being reported. The situation was complicated because these incidents seemed to occur like a virus, spreading from door to door of neighboring properties. The disheartening reality was that the industry members were not sharing this information with other properties; sometimes information was not even shared with local law enforcement for fear of negative public relations, which could result in lost business.

However, the media leaked information about these incidents, and a fire-storm of negative publicity spread throughout the state and region. To add insult to injury, police officers with less than appropriate public relations training, started interacting with visitors while working these reports at local businesses saying things like, "I don't know why people even come to Jackson, there is nothing here", or "I don't know why you're staying on this side of town; don't you know they have car thefts all of the time?"

After the incident reports were completed and officers interviewed staff on duty, it was noted that front-line employees had often seen suspicious persons hanging around their property but did nothing. Additionally, the Jackson Police Department had a great security evaluation program in place for residences and businesses, but few knew about it, so almost no one was using it.

While all of this negative publicity was being reported almost weekly on state-wide media outlets, Jackson's destination marketing organization was spending over \$3 million dollars annually to promote Jackson, Mississippi as a convention; meeting and visitor destination and something had to be done. Not only was this problem running economic growth and prosperity out of Jackson, the news regarding incidents occurring at conventions, meeting and events was spreading fast. Convention & Visitors Bureau sales staff was beginning to get inquires from state and regional meeting planners and event organizers regarding the safety of bringing business to Jackson, Mississippi.

The Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau's management team developed a task force bringing hotel/motel, restaurant, attractions and museums, special event management and private security firms to sit at the table with the leadership from the Jackson Police Department. After our first few meetings, we knew that success was imminent. Word spread about the initiative, and even local business not dependent on tourism inquired about how they could become involved. All involved knew that a program of this magnitude would be a win-win situation for Jackson, Mississippi, and "TOPS" was born!

## **Analysis**

The “TOPS” Program was discussed and embraced by the Mayor of the City of Jackson and the police chief, but with stringent budget constraints, providing even small funding for the program was unlikely at best. All interested parties were concerned; however, only one agency had the resources to address the issue.

With support from the Hotel/Motel Association and Restaurant Association leadership and a commitment from the local law enforcement chief to provide officers and administrative support, in 2004 the Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau president & CEO made a commitment to make initiating “TOPS” a strategic priority, and carved funding from the CVB’s budget to initiate the “TOPS” program. The hospitality safety task force, “TOPS” Committee, was developed and began exploring similar situations and programs around the country. The “TOPS” committee consists of two representatives each from the hotel/motel community, restaurateurs, attractions and museums, special events, private security owners and untraditional businesses (financial institutions and facility/property management firms). A Jackson CVB senior management team member became associated with the regional “*COPS*” office and began attending meetings and inquiring about appropriate training topics. The committee met monthly to review information and develop a mission statement and goals resulting in the following:

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Jackson, Mississippi TOPS Program is to promote visitor and citizen safety awareness while visiting and attending attractions, events, restaurants and hotels.

#### **GOALS**

The overall goal of the Jackson, Mississippi TOPS Program is to bring awareness of public safety to the visitor-based, tourism-oriented businesses in the city of Jackson, coupled with facilitating a communication network among those same visitor-based businesses, local law enforcement authorities, and available resources and programs.

After reviewing the occurrences, we found the criminals committing these acts were taking advantage of our ineffectiveness to organize and communicate. One of the first initiatives put into action was a “hotel alert system”. Hotels committed themselves to enact a simple telephone tree to area properties when a disturbance occurred. No longer would a “bad guy” have the opportunity to go from unsuspecting property to property. Now, front desk personnel, on-site private security and city law enforcement officers were notified that a crime had been committed in an area and to be on alert. The time of the incident, descriptions of suspects, and type of crime committed were reported to law enforcement officers and security personnel, sister properties and nearby businesses.

#### **Response**

After a lot of talking, convincing, and meeting with tourism partners, the systems put into place began to work, and we could see the results ... “bad guys” started getting caught and began moving out of the City of Jackson. The forging of a collaborative spirit was not easy, as noted. The propensity for competing hotels and restaurants to work together was not a natural one. A lot of trust had to be built for sensitive and vulnerable datasets to be shared with other businesses, and even the Convention & Visitors Bureau. The creditability of the Convention & Visitors Bureau’s twenty-two year history of ethical practices helped forge alliances. The difficulty was, then and now, to not let management and staffs revert back to business as usual. The Convention & Visitors Bureau spends a significant amount of time and resources on program awareness. Although the results are positive, the seemingly unnatural marriage of tourism and law enforcement is difficult to set in stone, no matter how well the program works.

### Relationship Building and Training

The Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau began meeting with the City of Jackson's Police Department and forged a relationship on behalf of the tourism industry in Jackson, Mississippi. The public relations, community outreach and community policing staffs became strong professional allies with the tourism office. Initial indicators of a growing and strengthening relationship included JPS command staff attending ALL monthly tourism industry meetings, a Jackson Police Department spokesperson serving as a speaker at one of the meetings, and the chief of police's present at most of the meetings.

Commanders and beat officers were introduced to tourism businesses at receptions, meetings were held on the premises of businesses to make sure officers felt welcome, and relationships were enhanced to include first name interaction and exchange of cell phone numbers by beat officers. Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau management began attending monthly COPS precinct meetings, serving as a speaker on several occasions. Other activities included:

- TOPS 101 Training

Each member of the Jackson Police Department command staff was required by the police chief to attend a day-long training session conducted by Jackson tourism officials on the Jackson, Mississippi tourism product. These sessions included panel discussions with representatives from the hotel/motel community, restaurant community, museum and attractions community and a session on public relations and media interactions. The day ended with a driving FAM or "familiarization tour" of the attractions, museums and economic development projects in the city of Jackson. By the day's end, law enforcement management was amazed at the Jackson, Mississippi tourism product and, enlightened about how they impact the effectiveness of the tourism office in their city.

- TOPS Mugs

The Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau provided 400 "hot/cold" travel mugs for beat officers. This mug encouraged and entitled officers to stop by restaurants and hotels on their beat on a regular basis to visit, get a complimentary soda or coffee and use the lobby as a place to stretch his/her legs from riding in a patrol car or to complete reports in a comfortable environment. Now the site of a JPD patrol car parked at the front door of a tourism business is welcomed; now the police are a part of the tourism family.

- National Night Out

Noted in the aforementioned narrative, Jackson is an urban community experiencing a terrific renewal. Not only are businesses returning to downtown, but loft apartments and condominium living are all part of the development, i.e., downtown is becoming a NEIGHBORHOOD! The Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau enlisted help from local downtown tourism businesses and the downtown business development district management firm and hosted the first Downtown Neighborhood's National Night Out Celebration. Hotels, restaurants and corporate businesses donated food, beverages and door prizes, even the Mayor's "Night Out Bus" and local media made the downtown celebration the first stop of the evening. One of the most upscale National Night Out celebrations in the city was now in downtown Jackson.

### Education and Resources

The “TOPS” 101 Training with command staff was a great hit. However, getting the message to the beat officers, front-line employees, and visitors/tourists was our ultimate goal. We also quickly discovered that management and staff alike were uninformed on programs of the Jackson Police Department or even how to use “911”. The following strategies were developed and executed to address this phase of the “TOPS” Program.

- Visitor Safety

One of the simple reminders to visitors was being made available in the form of a rack card, **“Tips for TOPS.”** This card is designed as a friendly reminder that although you are away from home and maybe even on vacation, criminals are still at work. Leaving shopping bags on the back seat of a car, a purse on the front seat, or a visible laptop computer is an “engraved” invitation to a would-be robber. The “Tips for TOPS” card suggests that when you leave home to visit Jackson . . . *bring your common sense with you.* We share emergency numbers, law enforcement headquarters and precinct locations on the rack card, and things to do when visiting any destination, i.e., get keys out of your purse prior to leaving a building or facility, don’t answer your hotel door without using the peep-hole, and if you didn’t call for assistance from a hotel employee and someone identifies themselves as such, call the front desk to verify.

Another resource we have developed is the **“TOPS” Program brochure.** This one page document gives an overview of the program and can be used by local citizens and visitors alike. The **“TOPS” Program brochure** has become popular and helpful when we include it in a competitive bid for business, informing meeting planners that we have a program in place to ensure their meeting or conference is not interrupted with an incident that could have been avoided. Special event officers now attend pre-conference meetings to review schedules and schedule increased security when needed, such as for high profile attendees, youth, elderly or all-female groups.

The convention services director also shares a **weekly conference and meeting calendar** with all precinct commanders and the mayor’s office, notifying them of upcoming conferences for the week, noting the need for increased patrols in anticipation of a heavy drive in market, or even equestrian events, which have expensive trailers and other associated equipment.

- “TOPS” Directory

The first document/resource developed for the “TOPS” Program was the “TOPS” Directory. This guide is for distribution to each of the tourism partners in the city of Jackson. It is our responsibility to ensure that two copies are available for staff usage at the front desk of each business.

The directory includes a joint letter from the Jackson Police Department’s Chief of Police and the President/CEO of the Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau outlining the mission and goals of the program. There is also a “how to” help sheet on how and when to use “911” and other JPD emergency numbers. Direct precinct numbers are listed, along with all police departmental numbers, fire department numbers and divisions, governmental emergency numbers and area hospitals. This unique guide lists every tourism partner by precinct so if a business is unsure of its assigned area, it’s only a page away. At the beginning of each precinct listing, Quality of Life unit officers are also listed with telephone numbers.

Quality of Life officers are our direct community liaisons to the police department.

- Facility Evaluations

This already established service of the Jackson Police Department was tremendous but very under utilized because local citizens and the business community were unaware of its existence. A problem existed with robberies at hotels and restaurants, not of guests or “front of the house” areas, but rather staff and kitchens and “back of the house” areas. After facility evaluations began, we quickly realized that most businesses:

1. left the employee entrance unlocked;
2. had poorly lit employee entrances;
3. often was overgrown with shrubbery, which helped conceal would-be criminals who might try to enter the building.

After correcting these problems, the incidences and occurrences of this activity decreased significantly. Our most successful model occurred at one of our major museums. During the holiday season, the museum noticed an increased number of reported car window breaks. After a facility evaluation by the law enforcement agency, a recommendation was issued to add lighting and signage reminding patrons to remember to “LOCK YOUR CAR” and “REMOVE VALUABLES FROM PLAIN SIGHT”. Since this installation of lighting and signage, there have been NO incidents to date!

We also reminded industry employees during training that this service is also available for personal residences, even on a Sunday afternoon-all offered by the Quality of Life unit free of charge.

- Hospitality Training Workshops

In addition to “TOPS” training, the Jackson Convention and Visitors Bureau offers FREE hospitality training workshops for all industry employees at least twice a year. Upon request the Convention & Visitor’s Bureau and the Quality of Life officers will also bring the “TOPS” Hospitality Training to the individual visitor based businesses, again FREE OF CHARGE.

Staffers from area businesses are exposed to enhanced customer service practices, the Jackson tourism product and inventory, and an orientation of the “TOPS” Program including how to be “eyes and ears” for the property they represent, From the front desk clerk, cashier, and maid to the engineering staff, all can make a difference in making our visitors safer and enhancing their stay in Jackson, Mississippi.

### Awareness

This phase of the project is supported by the marketing department and executive management of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, utilizing the following tactics:

- Local Tradeshows and Speakers Bureau

We have erected booths at local facility tradeshows and have served as speakers for convention groups, civic organizations and community and neighborhood meetings, and have sponsored appropriate recognition events to recognize service for beat officers and relationships between precincts, tourism businesses and beat officers.

- Advertising Specialty Items

With limited funding and financial resources, the following advertising specialty items have been developed and distributed to visitor industry and law enforcement personnel for top-of-mind awareness of the program and the agencies commitment to the program. All items display the program’s logo.

- **Pin on a string:** *Everyone knows that front line personnel are always trying to remember what they did with their pen.* The pen chosen has a neck cord and a tri color option; these were distributed to hotel clerks, housekeeping staff, restaurant wait staff, and law enforcement administrative personnel.
- **TOPS Mug:** Distributed to command staff and beat officers, these mugs also guarantee appropriate complimentary beverages at area hotels/motels and restaurants. The metallic purple mug is quite noticeable and makes front desk staff aware that “their” beat officer has entered the property.

- Collateral Materials

Printed materials were researched, produced and printed. *(Descriptions are noted above in a previous section)*

- “TOPS” Brochure
- Tips for “TOPS”
- “TOPS” Directory

### Response

From the very beginning the “TOPS” Committee determined that the return on investment would be measured by the results of the program. There have been positive results shared and we collected several success stories. Assessment of the program is evaluated annually when the Convention & Visitors Bureau’s senior management meets with hotel general managers to discuss upcoming plans. We repeatedly hear positive remarks or often get a repeated commitment to schedule a facility evaluation, showing that they realize and appreciate the value of the program.

As Reported by Precinct 4	
Reduction of Attraction Petty Parking Lot Reports	75%
Reduction of Hotel Parking Lot Reports	23%

The incidences of communication and investigating officer’s to speak negatively about economic/tourism businesses has decreased to almost zero. Assessment of our effectiveness is also garnered from the relationship growth reported by the Quality of Life unit. We hear time and time again that at the beginning of the year, an officer could not get a property general manager to return a phone call and by the end of the year, they are called out to the property to discuss a situation or sometimes enjoy “lunch on the house” to thank them. Even calling the Convention & Visitors Bureau directly *instead* of the police department to address a situation that has occurred. No complaints, the CVB just calls the appropriate commander and they get right on it – NOW THAT’S GROWTH!<sup>3</sup>

The program has also initiated alliances with similar initiatives in other cities via Destination Marketing Association, International *(formally the International Association of Convention & Visitor Bureaus)* and educational offerings at the COPS Conference sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice held in Washington, D.C.

The program collaborators are committed to growing the “TOPS” Program and have initiated

discussions with other area law enforcement agencies, including the local FBI. Additionally, plans to include at least a day of exposure to this topic to officers at the academy level has been approved and is under development by the Jackson Police Department and Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau for the next recruit class.

### **References**

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Censes Bureau, 2006 estimate;

<sup>2</sup>JCVB, National Tourism Week 2006 Report;

<sup>3</sup>Jackson Police Department - Web Crime Reports

### **For More Information**

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