## Acacia Park Police Service Center Summary

Acacia Park is a 1-square block park located in the center of downtown Colorado Springs. The park had a 40-year history of being a magnet for illegal activities and drew in large numbers of unsupervised youths, drug dealers and transients. This was leading to the social decay of the downtown area at a time the City was working to re-develop the area and having a negative financial impact on the surrounding businesses in the area.

Efforts by patrol officers, the Neighborhood policing Unit (a dedicated Problem Oriented Policing and School Partnership team), and Metro Vice/Narcotics to address the criminal activity usually ended having only short-term "Band-Aid" effects. Those tactics included high-visibility patrol, under cover drug purchases, and summer time focus on the park by the Neighborhood Policing Unit. In reviewing the marginal effectiveness of those efforts, it was determined that any long-term impact on the park would require a variety of approaches to include:

- Increased police presence.
- New laws to address transient issues.
- Partnerships with the businesses in order to effect changes in the Downtown environment

In doing an analysis of the park and the downtown area, it was determined that the makeup of the park, including the permanent structures located there, supported the establishment of a service center that would serve as a anchor for future problem-oriented policing efforts in the area.

The idea of the Acacia Park Police Service Center was first conceived by the Neighborhood Policing Unit sergeant who shared the vision with the Director of Park and Recreation. The idea included the re-design of an existing structure to house a service center and public restrooms in the park. Plans were drawn up and the concept was shared with the downtown business groups. With the support of Parks and Recreation and the business community, the concept was taken to the Springs Capital Improvement Program where citizens from the community placed it on a priority list for funding.

In August 2002 the Acacia Park Police Service Center was formally dedicated and opened for business. This facility, along with related problem-oriented policing efforts, has established the park as a family oriented location and has helped reestablish the downtown as a desirable shopping and social district. Police calls for service inside the park dropped by 55.25% and calls in the surrounding area dropped 14.17%. Case reports dropped by 81.96% and 41.52% respectively.

## Acacia Park Police Service Center Colorado Springs Police Department

Colorado Springs began in 1871 as a dream of General William Jackson Palmer who was overcome by the scenic beauty of the Pikes Peak region. Part of his dream included highlighting the scenic beauty of the area by including parks as part of his original layout for the city. Acacia Park was one of the two original parks General Palmer included in his city.

As the city grew and spread across the plains, the original downtown area fell into a slump. Acacia Park became known as the open-air drug market in the city. This problem was further enhanced by the presence of a high school across the street and the presence of all of the social services outlets for the city in the immediate area.

#### SCANNING

Problem identification was relatively easy. The area attracted a large number of unsupervised youths, the transient population and drug dealers that led to the degradation of the downtown area. High call for service rates and the financial impact on the business owners supported the theory that the park was a major staging area for criminal activity in the downtown area. Anyone familiar with the area could identify the problem; just no effective strategy to obtain a long-term impact on the area was developed.

At the time that the City was successfully revitalizing the downtown area, the criminal activity and its impact on the surrounding community was reflecting negatively on the City's overall effort.

Statistical analysis of the call for service rate by density for a variety of criminal activity supported the correlation between narcotics and street crimes and its impact on the area

#### ANAYLSIS

An analysis of the narcotics calls for service by density for the time periods of January 1999 to August 1999 and again for January 200 to August 2000 showed that Acacia Park was the center of drug activity in the downtown and surrounding area. Analysis of the calls for service rates by density for the crimes of Theft, Robbery, Assault, Vandalism and Criminal Trespass again showed that Acacia Park was again the center for these activities. (See Attachments) Along with traffic congestion and parking issues, Acacia Park and its related crime were the primary complaints of the downtown merchants and customers.

The park's history of being an open-air drug market in the Springs has existed for over 40 years. With a high level of foot and vehicle traffic in the area, and the presence of a high school across the street, the area was ideal for dealing drugs. The dealers had an ample supply of clients. These clients would then burden the area businesses with their presence while engaging in disorder and scaring away valued customers.

With the drug dealing came a large number of unsupervised youths who populated the park during the day. While some were students skipping out of high school, others were the near homeless youths who had no responsibilities and felt that they had nothing better to do.

Furthering the problem was the fact that the majority of the social services offered in Colorado Springs were based in and around the downtown area. This included the

Department of Social Services, the Marion House Soup Kitchen, the Red Cross Homeless Shelter, and a variety of day labor companies. All of these services drew the transient/homeless population into the area.

With shoppers fearing the downtown area and the businesses looking at bleak financial futures, it was clear that something had to be done.

Prior to the development of the Acacia Park Police Service Center, the problems in the downtown area were addressed in a piece-meal fashion. The Neighborhood Policing Unit would work the area during the summer months, when those officers assigned to a school were available for the summer. The Metro Vice/Narcotics unit would attack the drug trafficking through sporadic surveillance and buy/bust operations. Patrol units were instructed to conduct high-visibility patrol through the area during their discretionary time. Due to conflicting workload demands all of these tactics proved to have short-term "band-aids" impact on the total activity.

Further analysis revealed that the new makeup of the businesses in the downtown area was also having its effect. Many of the retail businesses were going out of business and a large number of bar and restaurants businesses were moving in. This led to a greater problem with the **transient/homeless** population as they began to aggressively panhandle the bar and restaurant costumers. Some of the businesses were found to be providing handouts in the form of food to many of the transients.

While statistical data was able to show the criminal problems present, it failed to identify the individual concerns of the business owners and patrons. Neighborhood Policing and Crime Prevention officers conducted surveys of the downtown business community seeking their views on the problems of their community. Along with the

problems of **traffic** congestion and limited parking availability, the activities that were going on in and around Acacia Park were a serious concern.

A major issue was the lack of public restrooms in the park. This was further exasperated by the fact that the City had installed an interactive fountain in the park that was drawing a large number of children with parents. Additional concerns included aggressive panhandling and transient/homeless individuals camping out on the sidewalks and entryways.

#### **RESPONSE**

Initial responses, outside the "band-aid" responses, included conducting a Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) survey of the park and downtown area, with the support of Park and Recreation. This led to a change in the foliage in the park allowing more natural surveillance over the area and the removal of some of the park benches that were staging areas for the drug dealers.

It was after interviewing one of the business owners whose business was adjacent to the park that the Neighborhood Policing Unit sergeant and the Crime Prevention officer for the Gold Hill Division embarked on the idea of establishing a permanent police presence in the park.

Noting the history of the park and the lack of effectiveness of prior police action, it was felt that a significant way to establish a long-term impact on the criminal activity, and enhance the downtown community, would be to establish a service center in the park.

Acacia Park was laid out with a band shell on the south side and a shuffleboard court on the north side. The shuffleboard area included a building that housed an equipment rental office, two non-functioning public restrooms and a storage area. In the

years prior to this time, when the Neighborhood Policing Unit deployed in the park using a mobile command center, it was noted that the **shuffleboard** facility was rarely, if ever, used.

The unit sergeant felt that this building could be re-configured to house a small contingent of neighborhood policing officers. Once open, this would also allow for the opening of public restrooms. It additionally would place officers in the area, providing a place to write reports or as a break area, that would help in furthering the relationship between the business owners and the police and thus, help in problem identification.

The Colorado Springs Police Department operates on the theory of "Empowerment." Officer are empowered to do the right thing without asking if what they are attempting to do is ethical, legal, right for the community, right for the CSPD, within our policies and values, and something you could take responsibility for and be proud of. Operating under this empowerment, these two officers, who happened to be meeting with the Director of Park and Recreation that afternoon, shared their idea at the meeting and received a very positive response from Park and Recreation. So positive was the response that the Director agreed to spend \$5,000.00 on the development of construction plans. He was asked to hold onto that idea until the concept could be discussed with the Chief of Police.

Support from the Patrol Command Staff and the Chief of Police was established with little effort. The problem was covering the cost of the construction. Capital improvement projects in Colorado Springs have to be presented to a volunteer group of citizens who evaluate and prioritize each project and make recommendations of funding. This project would have to go through this process if it were to become a reality.

To increase the chances of obtaining a good recommendation from the Springs Capital Improvement Program (SCIP), Neighborhood Policing and the Park and Recreation Division partnered with the downtown business and building owner association to develop support for the project.

Citing the changes in the business makeup in the downtown area and the increased number of young children and parents that were going to the park to play in the interactive fountain, it was determined that this project would be funded. Construction began in mid 2002 and was completed August 2002. Formal dedication took place August 8, 2002. The overall cost of the construction was \$125,000.00.

During the time of construction, Neighborhood Policing Unit officers, to include the Crime Prevention Officer for the division and the Patrol Division Commander helped establish and actively participated in the Downtown Safe Committee, designed to address concerns of business owner and patrons in the downtown area. The first meeting of the Downtown Safe Committee was February 5, 2002. Agenda items included:

- Acacia Park PD building and operation.
- Level of nighttime security and how to improve.
- Role of bar/restaurant owners in contributing to extra security.
- Contemplation of Business Improvement District (BID) contributions to add cameras/videos.
- BID research on models, legislation on vagrancy, panhandling, loitering.

The committee met each month in 2002 and discussed numerous issues concerning the downtown businesses and the police department's response, to their needs. The most

prevalent problems **identified** were vagrancy, panhandling, and loitering. Working together as a partner, the Police Department, concerned business owners, downtown residents, and the City Attorney's office, prepared three ordinances to be presented to City Council.

The new or modified ordinances, Solicitation Prohibited 9.2.111, Obstructing Passage or Assembly 9.2.104, and Possession of Unsealed Alcohol Beverage, were put into effect in January 2003. All were designed to address specific problems identified by the partners. The ordinances were designed to stop aggressive panhandling by not allowing repeated asking, contacting people who were waiting in line after dark, or working as a group to panhandle. (See Attachments)

This committee also helped develop a CSPD Downtown Business Information Book that contains program information, safety tips, shoplift and robbery prevention tips, and updates on city ordinances that directly relate to them. (See Attachments)

The committee continues to meet every other month to talk over issues that concern the downtown businesses and the police department. With the implementation of the ordinances, the committee has seen a positive response from the city government and complaints from citizens have decreased. Other problems the committee are looking into are the bar patrons on Tejon street at closing time and safety problems in the parking garages and parking lots, at night.

To further address transient/homeless issues, specifically the effects of littering and illegal camping in the area, the Police Department has partnered with Keep Colorado Springs Beautiful, a volunteer group dedicated to community beautification, in conducting transient site clean ups. CSPD Officer identify transient sites and provide

security for Keep Colorado Springs Beautiful who, utilizing volunteers, will go to transient sites and clean them up.

We approached this project with the intent to lower the call for service rate in and around Acacia Park. There was a concern that our presence in Acacia Park may only push the illegal behavior out into the street and closer to the businesses. We wanted to insure that this did not happen. As with any problem-oriented policing project, our goal was to address the "quality of life" and reduce the "fear of crime" throughout the downtown area. It was felt that if Acacia Park could shed its history as an open-air drug market and become a family friendly park, without pushing the illegal drugs into the neighborhood, negatively impacting the surrounding area, the center would be considered a success.

Prior to the center opening, Neighborhood Policing Unit officers spent time in the downtown area meeting with the business groups. Officers sought input as to what the business owners wanted to see come out of the Acacia Park Center and what they thought the impact the center would have on the downtown. Once the Center was opened, business owners were encouraged to contact the officer at the Center when in need of police services, outside an emergency.

One problem that needed to be addressed was how the Department was going to staff the Center. With the war pending at that time, the CSPD had a reduction in manpower due to military call-ups. This needed to be resolved prior to opening the Center. It was decided that officers on light-duty would be assigned to occupy the Center thus freeing others to work the street. We also worked with our volunteer coordinator who arranged for community volunteers to assist in manning the Center. The long-term intent is to free sworn manpower from directly working the Center while maintaining the positive impact

on crime and disorder by using members of the downtown community. Park and Recreation remains an active partner in the Acacia Park Police Service Center. They have scheduled a new season of shuffleboard to run throughout the summer and are directing their advertising toward the senior residence hotels located across the street.

Construction delays prevented the Center form opening prior to the peak of the 2002 summertime activities. The formal opening was on August 9, 2002.

#### <u>ASSESSMENT</u>

The Acacia Park Police Service Center has been deemed to be an unqualified success.

The support from the community has continued as strong as it was when the concept was being presented to the Springs Capital Improvement Program.

To evaluate the impact the Center has had on Acacia Park and the neighborhood, Call For Service rates and types, along with the number of report calls were obtained for the park address (115 E. Platte Ave.); the Police PDZ reporting zone which Acacia Park is located (2116); the Gold Hill Division of the Police Department; and the City of Colorado Springs. The time periods were from August 12, 2001 through March 16, 2002 and August 12, 2002 through March 16, 2003.

The data shows that the CFS rate in the park has dramatically dropped since the opening of the center (-55.25%). The CFS rate for the PDZ (reporting zone) that the park is in is also down but not as much as the park (-14.17%). The CFS rate for the Gold Hill Division shows a drop (-1.4%). Finally, the CFS rate for the city shows an overall increase (6.5%). The number of Case Reports has similarly dropped in each reporting area except the overall city numbers. Down 81.96 % in the park, 41.52% in the reporting PDZ, 6.30% in the Division but up 5.20% in the city.

#### The following tables reflect the data reviewed during this evaluation:

Acacia Park, 115 E. Platte Ave					
Call Type	8-12-01 to 3-16-02	8-12-02 to 3-16-03	% of Change		
Alcohol	1	. 2	100.00%		
Assault	17	2	-88.23%		
Disturbance	35	13	-62.85%		
Narcotics	20	2	-90%		
Robbery	в	1	-87.5%		
Suspicious	27	15	-44%		
Theft	5	2	-60%		
Vandalism	3	0	-100%		
Weapon	4	1	-75%		
Total ell calls	143	64	-55.25%		
Case Reports	61	11	-81.96%		

Acacia Park PDZ (2116)					
Call Type	8-12-01 to 3-16-02	8-12-02 to 3-16-03	% of Change		
Alcohol	8	7	-12.50%		
Assault	24	В	-66.66%		
Disturbance	95	85	-10.52%		
Narcotics	27	6	-78%		
Robbery	в	1	-87.5%		
Suspicious	55	47	-14,54%		
Theft	20	11	-45%		
Vandaksm	16	6	-63%		
Weapon	5	3	-40%		
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Total for all types	536	460	-14.17%		
Case Reports	171	100	-41.52%		

Gold Hill Division					
Call Type	8-12-01 to 3-16-02	8-12-02 to 3-16-03	% of Change		
Alcohol	387	287	-25.80%		
Assault	740	656	-11.40%		
Disturbance	2484	2383	-4.10%		
Narcotics	700	556	-20.60%		
Robbery	88	74	-15.9%		
Suspicious	2951	3374	14,30%		
Theft	1773	1555	-12%		
Vandalism	1008	878	-13%		
Weapon	136	131	-3%		
Total for all types	33397	32917	-1.40%		
Case Reports	11156	10448	-6.30%		

Colorado Springs					
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Call Type	8-12-01 to 3-16-02	8-12-02 to 3-16-03	% of Change		
Alcohol	836	665	-20.50%		
Assault	1854	1709	-7.80%		
Disturbance	7637	7753	-1.10%		
Narcotics	1491	1508	1.10%		
Robbery	278	275	-1.1%		
Suspicious	8776	10608	20.90%		
Theft	6031	6037	0.10%		
Vandalism	3435	3332	3.00%		
Weapon	400	439	9.80%		
Total for all types	105100	111915	6.50%		
Case Reports	35788	37647	5.20%		

The results of this evaluation were shared with the CSPD Staff along with the Downtown Safe Committee.

The Center also servers as a drop in location where citizens can come and obtain police information, reports and brochures

In addition to the Center being a success, the implementation of three new ordinances had further improved the quality of life and reduced the fear of crime in the downtown area.

Prior to the ordinances being accepted by our City Council, Police Department routinely received calls from the public and business owners complaining about aggressive panhandling. Since the institution of the three ordinances, complaints have dropped to almost zero.

We feel that a good part of this drop is due to the way we implemented enforcement of the ordinances. A 30-day grace period was instituted during which time the Neighborhood Policing Unit educated all Patrol Division officers on the ordinances. Additionally, a public education effort was undertaken in which Neighborhood Policing Unit officers shared the information not only with the businesses in the affected area, but also with those individuals whose behavior in the past would now be a violation of the ordinance. Field Interview Reports were completed on any individual observed in violation of any of the ordinances and a verbal warning was issued. A database was maintained by the Crime Prevention officer and accessible through the Communications Center. If an individual had received a warning during the grace period, and continued his or her behavior during the grace period, the second contact could result in a summons being issued. The database contains 43 names with only 3 receiving a summons.

A "Don't Give" campaign was initiated through the Downtown Safe Committee that directed those who wished to help the needy to give to a service provider instead of an individual. This would help insure that the donations would go for what those in need really needed.

Other positive results we observed included a change in the overall condition of the park. Park Maintenance Supervisors advised that prior to the opening of the Acacia Park Police Service Center, time to clean and maintain the park was approximately 3 hours per day. Since the Center opened, that time has been reduced to 30 minutes per day. During the construction of the Center, Park and Rec. began to service the tables and benches throughout the park in anticipation that this park may once again be a premier site.

The Park and Recreation Division is undertaking the expense of reseeding the entire park to enhance the overall appearance of the park. This is a direct result of the police presence in the park. Those using the park are taking better care of the park and cleaning up after themselves.

The overall complexion of the park has changed from that of an open-air drug market with large groups of unsupervised youths and homeless/transients hanging out, to a real family oriented park that once again fits into the dream of General Palmer.

As with any problem of this magnitude, based on the nature of those involved, we expected some displacement. We anticipated this problem and identified the location where most of these individuals would disperse. The area is another known drug market and hangout for the transient population. It is located in an area that is more conducive to police intervention, allowing for more natural surveillance and has limited ingress/egress. The Neighborhood Policing Unit, along with Metro Vice/Narcotics, has been addressing those issues through a variety of police tactics.

The presence of the Acacia Park Police Service Center in Acacia Park has proven to be the basis for the improvements in the park. Since the opening, the park has been staffed by light-duty officers and volunteers. Neighborhood Policing Unit officers work the downtown area using the center as a base of operations. By staffing the center as we do, it allows the Neighborhood Policing Unit officers the opportunity to address the downtown area. Patrol officers assigned to neighboring zone/sectors are also using the center to complete reports, make phone calls, or meet individuals, enhancing the police presence in the area.

Based on the success of the Acacia Park Police Service Center, the Colorado Springs City Council has considered adding a similar type center in a new large community park under construction at this time. The decision to add a center is pending.

As manpower issues are resolved, the idea of housing the Gold Hill Division Neighborhood Resource Officers in this center is under consideration. These officers serve as a resource to the communities that they area assigned and a liaison between the community and the Department.

The Acacia Park Police Service Center is an unqualified success. It, along with the other related efforts, has met the goal set forth in the project. The park and the downtown area of Colorado Springs has benefited by its presence, as have the citizens of, and visitor to, Colorado Springs. The park once again highlights the scenic beauty of Colorado Springs and the Pikes Peak region.

## Acacia Park Police Service Center Agency and Officer Information

The concept of the Acacia Park Police Service Center was initiated on the officer/unit level of the Colorado Springs police Department. The sergeant in charge of the Gold Hill Division Neighborhood Policing Unit, in conjunction with the Crime Prevention Officer for the unit, developed the concept. Using Problem Oriented Policing and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design concepts, it was felt that the only way to obtain a long-term solution to the problems in the park and the downtown area was to establish high visibility-long term police presence there.

The Colorado Springs Police Department is a leader in the application of Problem and Community Oriented Policing having been selected by Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) office as a national demonstration center. All officers are expected to apply Problem and Community Oriented Policing practices to all of their duties to the benefit of the citizens of Colorado Springs. All officers have received training in the concepts of problem oriented policing, whether it was during their police academy of through in-service training. Neighborhood Policing Unit officers have extensive advanced training in these areas. Some of this training was provided by the Colorado Regional Community Policing Institute.

Officers openly involve themselves in problem solving and understand the long-term benefit to such practices. Of the officers involved in this project, The Unit Sergeant, Sergeant Brian Ritz, received a Department Leadership Award for his efforts.

Our one guideline that enables our officers to aggressively participate in problem solving is our Empowerment card. The Colorado Springs Police Department operates on

the theory of "Empowerment." Officer are empowered to do the right thing without

asking if what they are attempting to do is ethical, legal, right for the community, right

for the CSPD, within our policies and values, and something you could take

responsibility for and be proud of.

The Center was funded through the Capital Improvements budget for the City of

Colorado Springs after receiving a recommendation form the Springs Capital

Improvement Program (SCIP). SCIP is comprised of volunteer citizens who prioritize

and make recommendations to the City Council on what projects capital improvement

money is spent. The total cost of the project was an estimated \$125,000.00. The Police

Department budget was not impacted by the development of this project.

The Acacia Park Police Service Center falls under the direction of the Gold Hill

Neighborhood Policing Unit supervisor, Sergeant Brian Ritz.

Personal Information

Sergeant Brian S. Ritz

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Herman Goldstein Award Selection Committee Policy Executive Research 1120 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 930 Washington, D.C. 20036

April 24, 2003

To the Members of the Selection Committee:

The Downtown Partnership of Colorado Springs is pleased to offer this letter in support of the Colorado Springs Police Department and the community policing efforts they have made in Downtown Colorado Springs.

For a number of years, the behaviors exhibited at one of the key downtown parks were so troublesome that many people who work and visit downtown avoided going into the park. A number of attempts were made to incorporate crime prevention design, increased musical programming through the Park department, and periodic sweeps. And yet, the problems persisted.

When the CSPD secured special funds to convert a former parks building into the Acacia Park Community Service Center, a real change began to occur in Acacia Park. Although funding limitations prevent this center from being a twenty-four hour police substation, the Center **functions** effectively like one. With volunteers and police using the Center as a convenient Downtown drop-in center, the level of activity and "eyes" in the park have dramatically increased the presence of park users and decreased the number of park "abusers". This was one of the goals for the Center.

CSPD has utilized other types of community policing in downtown, as well. Deploying bicycle units, for example, is a very visible presence on downtown streets and a technique we find quite effective in increasing everyone's sense of safety. CSPD and Downtown Partnership also co-sponsored the production of the "Good Neighbor Handbook" for downtown, a manual on how to look out for neighboring businesses and the public, and who to contact to solve **various** problems. When the Downtown Partnership produced an anti-panhandling campaign called "There's a better way to help", members of the SAFE Downtown Task Force and CSPD helped distribute the posters and table tents throughout Downtown.

But finally, a mention of the year's most vital change in the tools for keeping downtown feeling safe and secure for everyone; the adoption of new ordinances that prevent aggressive panhandling and sleeping in doorways, benches, etc. The CSPD worked with the SAFE Downtown Task Force, a group of citizens, downtown residents, churches and business people, to draft these ordinances. With the help of the City attorneys' office, the proposed ordinances were presented to City Council and passed into law.

At the public hearings, it was quite telling that no one from the community spoke against these tools, but rather, all who testified, including the task force members, supported the ordinances. When the level of panhandling and loitering interferes with everyone's right to use the downtown sidewalks and benches, then changes are needed. We credit CSPD for recognizing that downtown could no longer tolerate the behaviors seen on the streets of downtown.

Downtown has already seen results. Indications are that the summer will prove much more enjoyable for anyone using the public spaces of Downtown and much less threatening. We hope that the Herman Goldstein Award will be conferred on this very deserving police department. CSPD has responded with persistence, creativity and a real sense of community to Downtown's security issues. Please give our request serious consideration.

Beth Kosley Executive Director

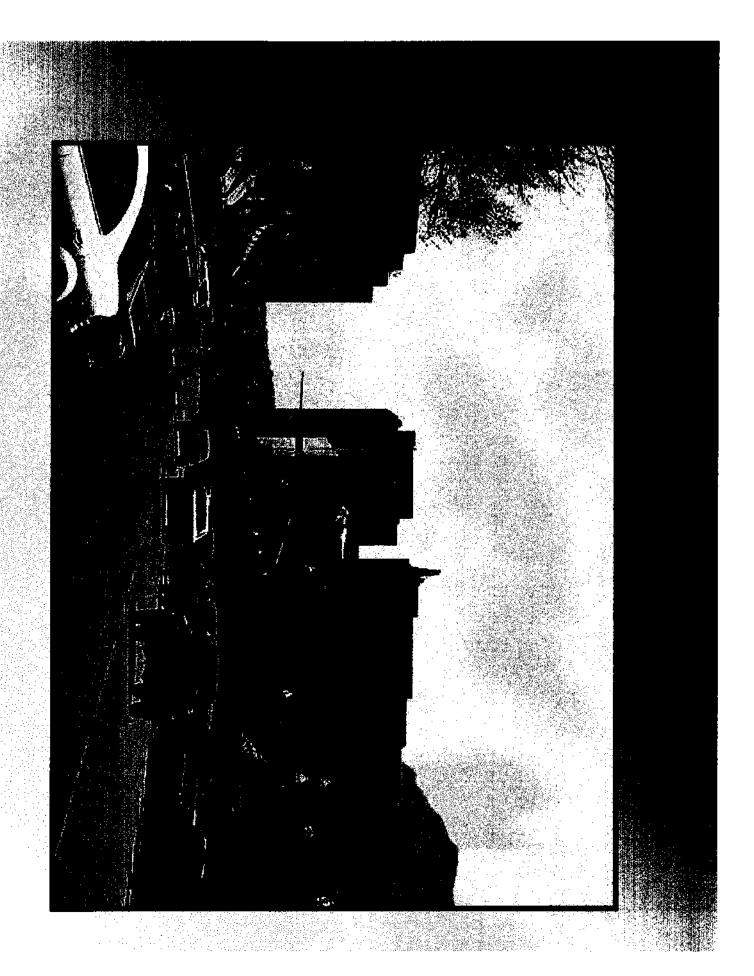
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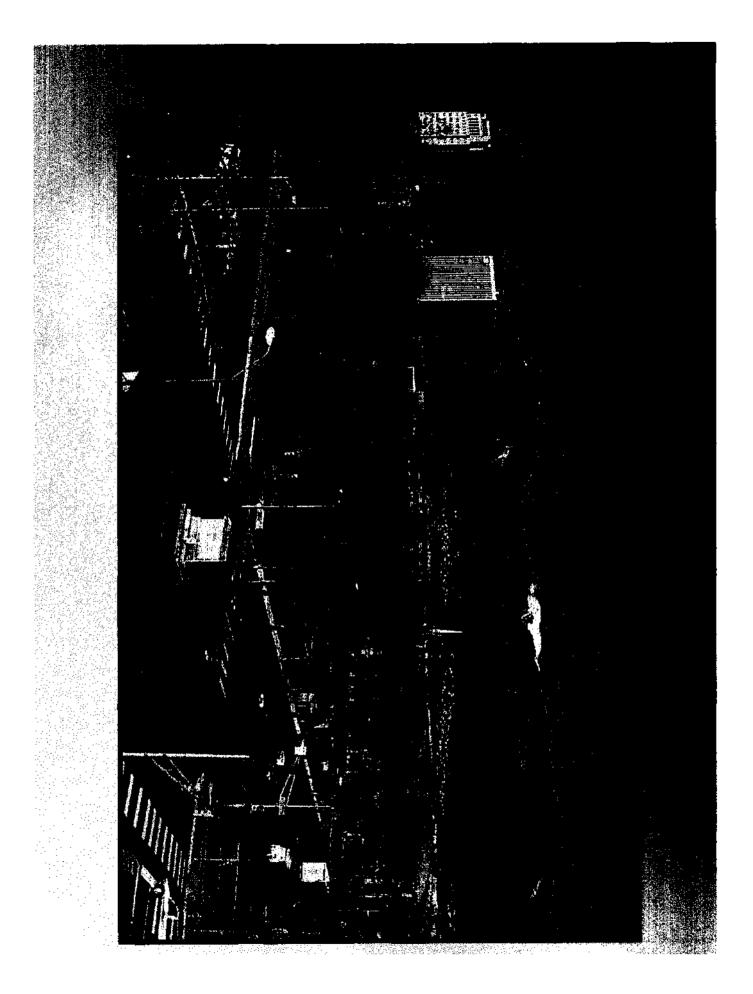
#### CSPD EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

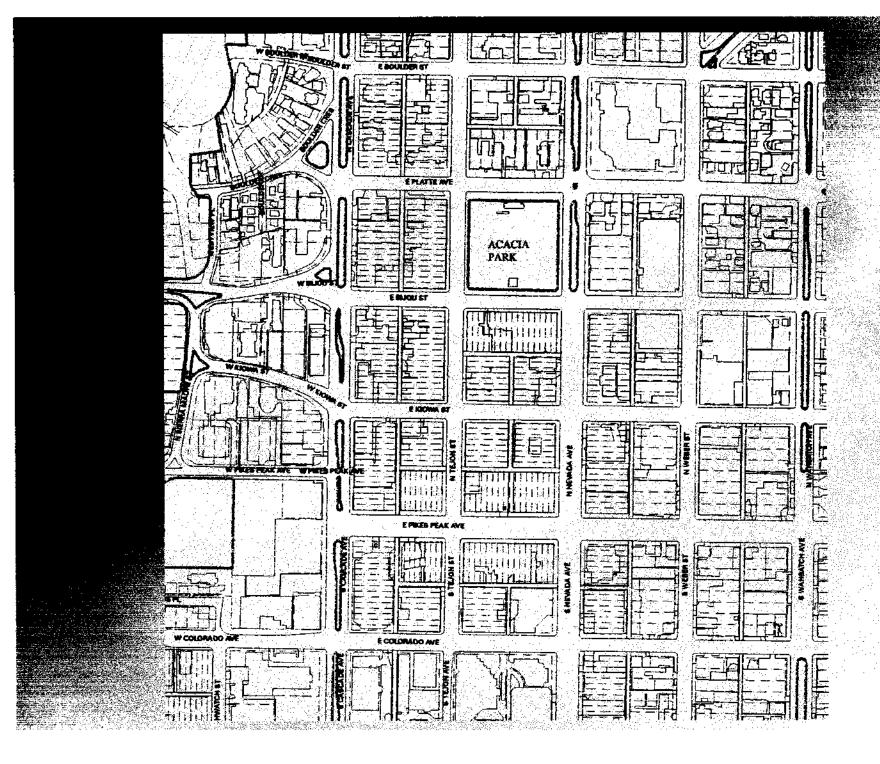
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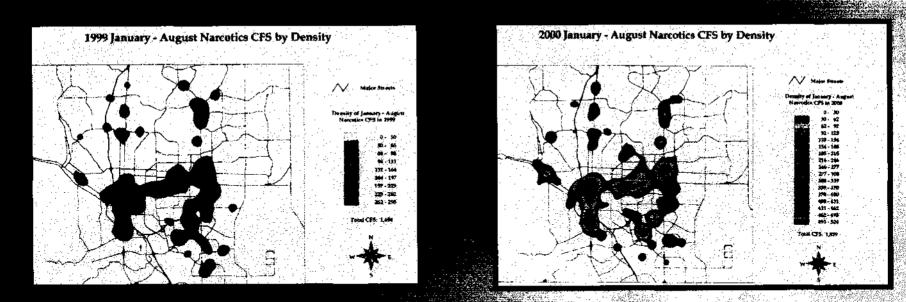
If the answer to all these questions is YES—then don't ask permission— JUST DO IT!

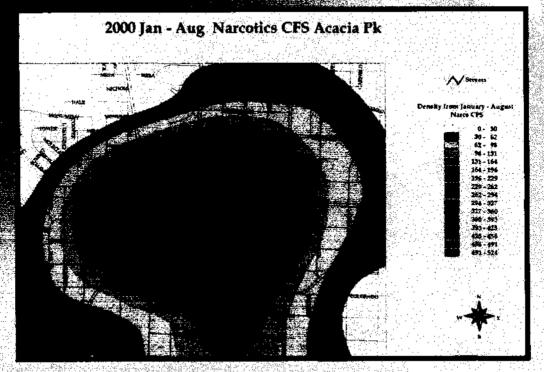
The Colorado Springs Police Department recognizes and values a shared responsibility between the police and the community to make Colorado Springs an even safer and more livable city, and is committed to effective use of all its resources to enhance this environment.











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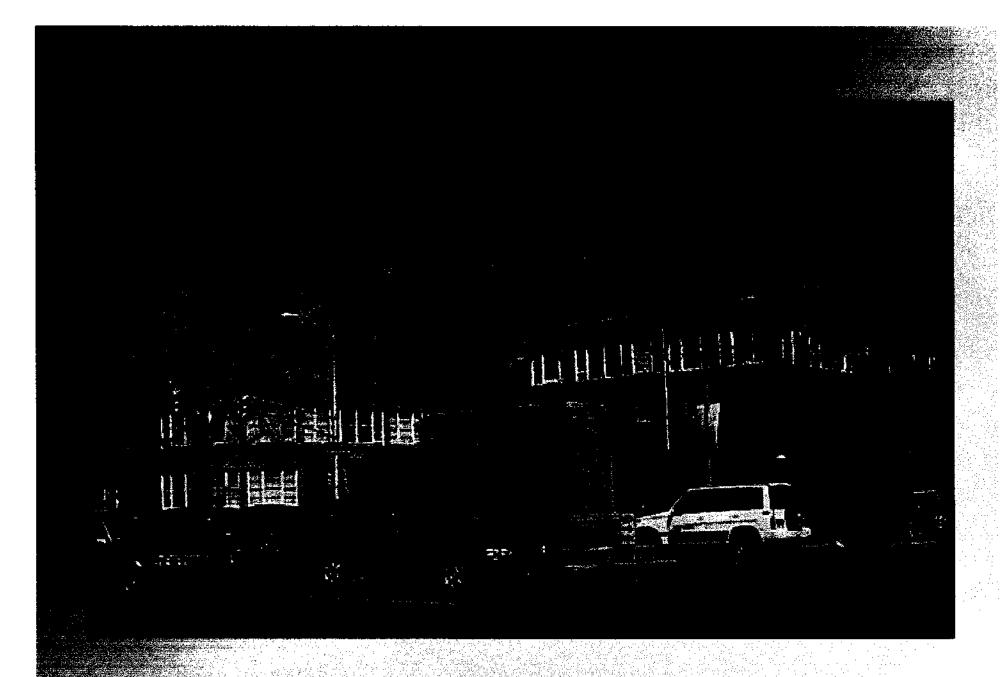
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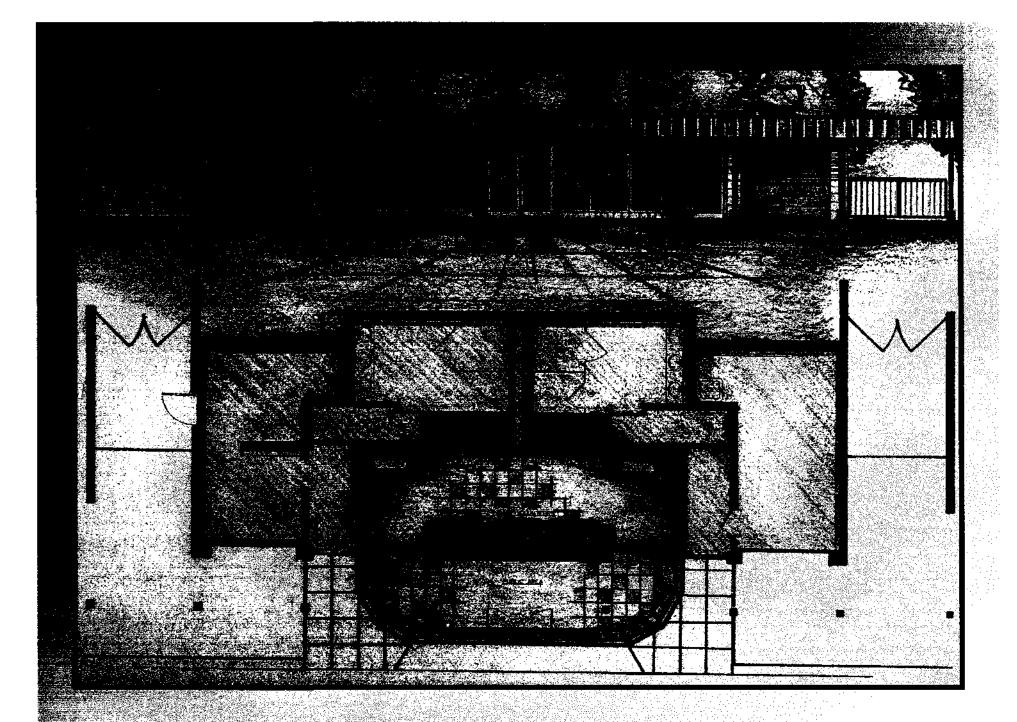
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# ACACIA PARK POLICE SERVICE CENTER

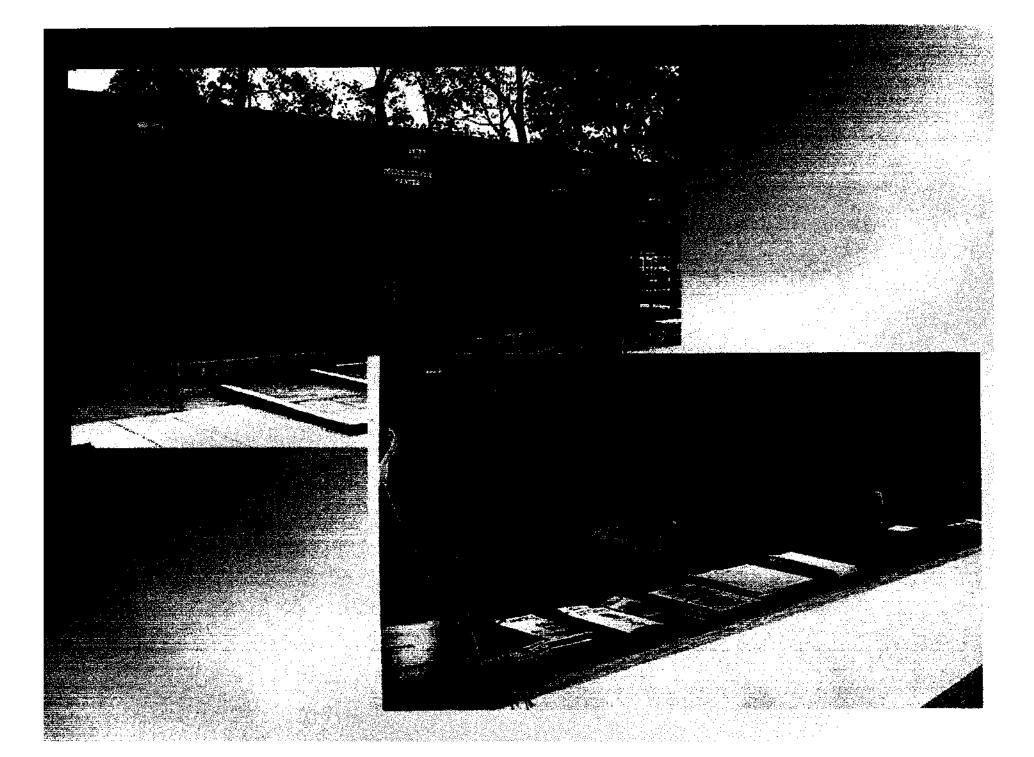


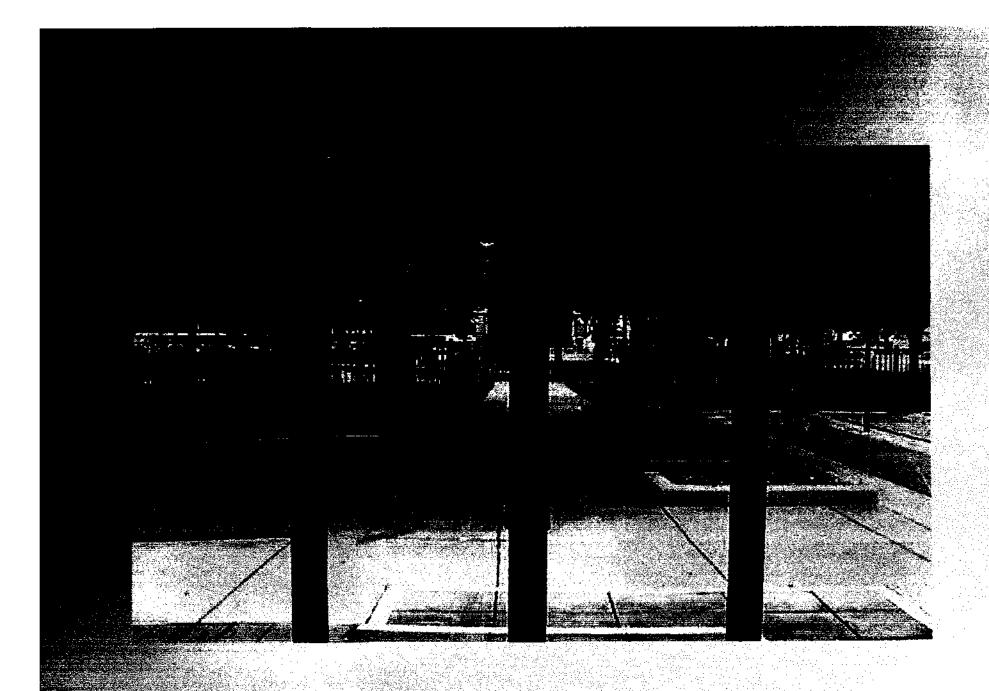
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SHUFFLEBOARD CENTER







## Public A Restrooms

