Bancuk, Lisa Oral History Interview: History of Law Enforcement in Holland

Matthew Nickel

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/holland_law

Part of the Archival Science Commons, and the Oral History Commons

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/holland_law/1

Published in: 2002 - History of Law Enforcement in Holland (H88-0234) - Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project, June 5, 2002. Copyright © 2002 Hope College, Holland, MI.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Interviews at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in History of Law Enforcement in Holland by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.
ABSTRACT: (Topics Appear in similar order of Transcript)
Roles in the department, How Bancuk became an officer, First impressions of the department and Holland, Work of a Field Training Officer, Negotiation Team, Education, Girls on the Run, Involvement in the community, Rewards of an officer, Being female on the force, Community between officers, Change of the HPD, Policing Hope College, Community Policing and benefits, Bancuk’s involvement in Community Policing, Team Policing, Working with Hope College and Hope College Public Safety, Challenges of Hope College, How the community can get involved, Community perception of HPD, Gangs
Could state your, and describe your position with the Holland Police Department?

Everything I do or just my main position, or do you want all the things I am involved in?

How about all the things you are involved in as well.

Officer Lisa Bancuk, I have been on the police department, it will be 11 years in August. I started out in patrol and then I went to community policing, and now our department went to three teams, we have a team policing concept, so we’re considered a TAC officer, Team Area Coordinator, I am also on the negotiation team, I am a field training officer, I train the new officers who come on, I’ve been on the union board, I just got off of that, I am involved as a board member for Women in Transition. I have done a lot of liaison work with Hope College in a lot of other areas, Community Action House, Boys and Girls Club I work with, so I have done a lot with communities and kids in the area.

How did you originally get involved in police work?

Well, when I graduated from high school at first I wanted to be in computers, and I thought that I want to work with people, I don’t want to work behind a computer, so I took some classes at a community college in police work, and I really enjoyed it so I went there two years, then I went to Grand Valley, got my Bachelor’s Degree in Criminal Justice, I really liked it, I worked in an internship in Grand Haven, worked on the boardwalk. I also worked in the office there, and
I really liked that, then I went to the Police Academy back in 1990, I work a few part time jobs, Roosevelt Park and Spring Lake, and then I got hired here full time.

MN When was that?


MN So you have been with the department for a while…

LB Yes, it’ll be 11 years in August, and I just went back and got my Master’s Degree in Public Administration, I just graduated in April.

MN Congratulations!

LB Thank you.

MN Did you have any mentors along the way, was there any individual who influenced you?

LB None of my family is in law enforcement, really no friends, there was the chief of police in Roosevelt Park, I knew his kids growing up, he didn’t live down the street, him and his wife were divorced, but he wasn’t really a mentor for me. So I just, really there was no one, I just liked the work, I thought it would be, it would suit my personality. I did that, but I really didn’t have any mentors in the field at all.

MN Are you from Holland originally?

LB I am from Muskegon, well, actually Roosevelt Park.

MN Okay, I am not familiar with Roosevelt Park.

LB Its just one square mile and its just on the border of Muskegon.

MN Do you have family here in Holland?
LB No, when I came here, when I first started I really didn’t know anybody, the only people I knew was from the police academy some of the instructors, but other than that I didn’t know a soul in Holland.

MN What was your first impression coming to Holland, being in the department?

LB After I started?

MN After you started working what was your first impression of the department here?

LB I worked a little bit in Roosevelt Park, and that’s in Muskegon County, and I noticed the negative attitudes, and when I came here everybody was so friendly, the all wore positive attitudes, everybody worked well, and really made me feel welcome. They help out along the way. So I think just how nice they were and how much talked, I really liked that about it.

MN Makes a big difference.

LB It does, a big difference.

MN You said that you worked as a field training officer, could you describe what that entails?

LB About five years ago, before, when police officers started, you would put them with a couple of different officers for a couple of days and then they are on their own. Well, with fielding, we to training tasks on every single, well basically we try to break down every call, like if you have a malicious destruction of property, a larceny from a building, a homicide, we try to break that down into a formal process. It’s a four step program, we just increased it to about 12 to 14 weeks, so when an officer comes on they are assigned to three officers, and they will go with each officer for four weeks and then after the third week they will go back to
the first officer. So it is a very intensive training. I ride with them, you coach them, I don’t want to say grade, but you rate what they do, everything they do from their driving, there are different categories, from their driving to their geography, to their knowledge of the laws, their written communication, their verbal communication. So it is just very intensive, and then they add up their scores, and you have weekly meetings, and we work as a team. I think there is about seven of us on the team.

MN Now did you go through this program?

LB Yes, I was the first one to have someone here. When I went through it, the officer I trained, I said, this is a new experience for both of us, I didn’t really have anybody to ask because no one has gone through it before. So we have really come a long way since we first started.

MN You also mentioned the Negotiation team. What kind of work does that require?

LB There was three people on a negotiation team, it was not real organized, they decided to get a five person team, we interviewed for it, myself and Officer Wallace, got chosen, went to school last, it was probably almost a years ago, last April, and we train regularly on barricaded gunman situations and we do role-plays, we try to train once a month for about five hours, and then we have a scenario which actually we have tomorrow, with the SET team, our tactical team, so we are going to set up a whole scenario, try to make it as realistic as possible, so then last night we had the one that was my first negotiation ever, in a real situation. So I have been doing that for about a year now.

MN Where do you train and set up these scenarios?
LB Last time we did it at Johnson Controls, kind of an office type of situation. What we are doing is an abandoned house. We are going to make up a situation there. We are going to try and do a school eventually.

MN So you use real situations in real places.

LB Right, and our weekly training, is like, we have a hostage phone that we use and we go over that. With negotiation you are talking more about feelings with people, its not 'oh I hear your feeling sad' you try to work with them, that way that is kind of the whole philosophy behind the negotiation team.

MN Could you talk about your involvement with the Junior Police Academy. Chief Kruithoff has told me a little bit about it, and it sounds interesting, what's your role?

LB Right now I am not doing anything. One of our officers was off on pregnancy leave a couple of years ago, so I just did it for the one term. Do you want me to explain what the program is?

MN Chief Kruitoff explained a lot of it...

LB So I only did it for one time, but it was really a great program.

MN What did you find exciting about it?

LB Number one, the kids during the summertime are doing something constructive, they are meeting people from all over, they are not just meeting kids that they hang out with, they are branching out to different schools, and hopefully have a respect for police and what we do. We try to show them what it is like to have an interview with the jail, the court system, so they really get a better understanding.

We have a Citizen's Police Academy which I have been involved with too and
that is the adults going through the program, so we have that also, I have done that for a few years, and I have taught on community policing classes, and I have had people ride with me on that too.

MN Do you think it changes the reputation of the department?

LB Yes and I think with the Citizen’s Police Academy, we have about 12 people go through it. It is a ten-week program, so it is a big commitment, and you can’t miss I think more than one. But what we want is, these people to realize ‘jeez, I understand why this officer can arrest somebody after they have gotten in a fight’ they understand the laws, and then hopefully they will go out and tell their friends. When I rode with that officer for ten hours, I realize why they sit in the parking lot. I always wondered. ‘All the cops do is sit in the parking lot’, I understand what they go through. So hopefully they tell their friends, and then their friends so eventually we can…

MN umbrella

LB yes, that is what we are hoping to do with that. And they see the court system; they meet a lot of people in the community, so that’s a very successful program. Everybody wants to have a graduate program; [laughs] but we are not there yet.

MN What about Women in Transition, you are a board member?

LB I have been on there four or five years, I have just, I go to the board meetings, we do the capitol campaign, we have a new building now. I am just involved. One reason one reason I am on the board is because of the police department, so people can understand where we are coming from as police officers, and what actually happens, so that is really why I started out as a liaison with the police
department, and now I just, it is a great organization and domestic violence is such a serious, so serious now in our society, and how many calls we get daily for domestic violence situations. So, it is a very good reputable organization, and I am just hoping with our programming and working with the abusers that we can make a difference. So that is why I have been on that.

MN I am not familiar with the organization *Girls on the Run*, but I understand you are involved with them?

LB Last year I did it, this year I was not able to because I had to take some classes then, but I think I am going to do it next year. It is a program that came last year, it is a national program, girls between, I think it is fourth and fifth grade, or third and fourth grade, all their, there’s so many sites around, I worked in the boys and girls club. And what we do is we try to teach positive healthy relationships, healthy habits, along with having fun. And at the end of the, I think it is a month and a half or two month program, we have a final run, which actually is this Saturday, it is a 5k run. So you lead up to that. What you do is you have exercises, like one of them I did was, I am trying to think to give you an example, we had different types of foods, and what you had to do is run down and put it in what category, was it a good food, or a, right? And then within these lessons, they are actually getting exercise and then they have to do runs, and while they do their runs you have to yell at them and see how they feel and the other person is saying ‘jeez, you are doing an excellent job’ and the other person will say ‘get going and…’ and then we say ‘see how you talk to someone nice, see how that makes you feel?’ We try to do the physical activity along with the mental, and
hopefully change as a person, especially women, especially with their weight, that is a big deal and health issues, and just be positive and hopefully when they grow up they can take this back with them.

MN You are really involved in the community, what drives you, what keeps you involved?

LB Number one, I don’t have kids, and it is hard to be in this profession and especially for the female and have kids, we have a couple of officers that do, and they work day shift because of their schedule, but it is tough. One person decided to leave after she had two kids because it was so hard to do. So I don’t have any kids, so I feel I have the time to do that and help out the community, and I love people, I love working with people, we just had something, a couple of months ago, the Boys and Girls Club had, each year they nominate someone to go to the regionals, well the person we choose won the state, and I was on the board for that and it was so neat, to see, you hear so many things about bad kids, that is all we hear as police officers, so I think it is good for me as a police officer to see the good things that people are doing because all we deal with mostly is juveniles who have done things wrong, so I like to look at the other side and help out those people.

MN This goes along the same line, but what do you find rewarding about your job?

LB I love coming to work everyday, probably the most rewarding, everybody always says ‘you want to help people’ it is just rewarding just to be able to talk to people and be able to really, and it is to help people, and I like the excitement. When you get a hot call, you like the excitement of the job, we would not be in it if we didn’t
like the excitement, I would be lying to you. It is that unknown, and I don’t think it is very stressful, police work, it is that unknown stress, that all of a sudden you could be driving down the road and two seconds later you could have someone shooting down the road. So it is that excitement, I like the people, and being outside in the community, and it gives me opportunities to do all these other things.

MN What kinds of, sort of on the antithesis, what kinds of challenges and concerns do you have working as a police officer?

LB The hours. That is one thing, after a while. When you are young, I like working midnights all time, but then you start, for so many years that I did work nights and midnights, you can’t be involved in things. I couldn’t be on a softball team or a volleyball team because I had to work all the time. And your social life goes down because people keep trying to call you and then it is just like ‘I guess she has to work.’ So now we have every other month of weekends off, but I probably worked a year straight of weekends. So I think that and working holidays and family, and it is hard on family. You know you plan something or they call and want to have a get together, but you have to work. I think one of the down things is the schedule, but in the other sense, I think having weekdays off sometimes. I guess you try to make a positive out of the negative. And sometimes the working conditions, it is cold, say it’s 10 degrees below zero, you are outside, those type of little things, whereas in an office situation you are always warm. Seeing things with children is probably the worst, that is what kind of surprises me the most. From when I first started to now, how young they are getting involved in drugs,
and sex and all these gangs, and I think, not the downfalls, but that's really an eye
opener.

MN Have you had any unusual learning experiences on the job?

LB What do you mean by unusual?

MN Any particular story or something that stuck you as different, kind of maybe
changed the way you see Holland or see your job or you position or maybe
changed you attitude?

LB I guess when I came in here being a female? Being smaller. I know that I am not
going to take down a guy that is 300 pounds, or even someone that's, there are
certain things that no matter how big that person is, I am not going to take that
person down, compared to an officer that's [gestures height]. So over the years I
guess one of the lessons I have learned is that I have to talk my way out of a lot of
things, and how you treat people, if you explain to them what is going on instead
first and saying "you are under arrest" I try to explain the situation to them, and I
try to make the outcome, sometimes you can't avoid that, but people I deal with, I
find if you explain to them, hey you are under arrest before grabbing them, you
save a lot of situations, you have to really think through things. I think that is one
of the things that I have probably learned the most in this job is words go a long
way. And you can come to someone, and your attitude towards someone can
make someone mad, and I could probably make a lot of people mad under a lot of
situations, with people in drugs and alcohol, so I think that is one of the main
things that I have learned, is I have to talk my way through a lot of things. And I
think that is probably one of the good points that I have. That's why I think I was
chosen for the team, because I am not, there are some officers who are a lot better shot than me, or a lot more tactical in situations. They love to do the sniper thing. And that is one thing that is good about our department, everybody has, everybody does a great job overall. We all have our specialties, that we, and we feed off of each other in that way.

MN What is it like as a female officer in Holland?

LB When I first came on, I worked in Roosevelt Park, I worked part time, so I was coming and going so I didn’t really get the feel of the other departments, so this is the real first department, besides academy with the female issue. What I did is when, before I became a police officer I wanted to do everything like everybody else, I did not want to just get a two year degree, there is nothing wrong with that, but I wanted to get my four year degree, I wanted to go through one of the best academies in the state, I wanted to work like everybody else, I didn’t just want to get the job because I was female. So I did all that, and so I felt that everybody was… I have not really noticed a big difference, the only thing I do notice, and I think it is still there, I think I am the fifth female they have hired on the road, or fourth, I am not exactly sure, there was one who was on the road before me, a couple of years. When a female first starts, you have to prove yourself a little more than the male, like myself and another officer got hired at the same time, a male officer, and I make a traffic stop after I was on my own, and another officer would come and make sure I am doing everything right, if I am standing the way you’re supposed to stand, if it was a male officer, they would not look so in depth
about that, you would not have to prove yourself as much I guess. You understand?

MN

yes.

LB

Because, yes, you are supposed to stand behind, but because if a guy was standing in wrong position, or didn’t have their flashlight in their left hand, they would not even mention it, but they want to make sure the female is doing everything right I think. You have to prove yourself more, and it takes longer to prove yourself. Because you always hear ‘oh, she’s a good female’ instead of ‘their a good officer.’ Male officers, yes, they are the ones who can do a better job, but we have to prove ourselves to get to someplace, and they already have that. They can just go down; because of their own, what they are doing theirselves. But everybody is nice, I never felt, we have never had a female promoted here, so I don’t know how that is going to be someday. But, like I say, every officer here is very talented and they can all do a good job but...

MN

Do you think there is a particular reason for how careful, the female, how they are doing things, how they have to prove themselves, do you think there is a particular reason for that?

LB

I did talk to one officer, he is retired now, he said ‘you know, I trust everything you do, and all of you do a great job, but it is just something I was born with, this kind of protect women’ and the younger generation, I don’t know if they feel that as much, but the ones who have been here for a while, that’s just, and their wives I am sure weren’t career, their kids might start getting into it, but I think it is just a mentality, we have to protect you and for us to go to a fight call, it is something
like ‘well, we have to protect you too’ so it is just the mentality of getting over that. And that is hard to do, and I still think, no matter what, you are going to be proving yourself. If we do something wrong on a call, people are going to look and say look what she did instead of ‘we all make mistakes’ I think in that respect to. But overall, it has not affected my job, and I get along with everybody, if I think about it, that is what I would go back to, but it is nothing that, it has not affected my job or what I do in any way. And I like everybody here, so, that is just what I would say, but overall I have been really accepting of females, but like I said we have not had anyone higher than an officer, so we’ll see.

MN  You talk about the acceptance, and it seems like as a whole, but what kind of community is developed both on the job and off the job between officers; is there a particular kind of community that’s built between you and your co-workers?

LB  Oh, you mean just working with officers? Are we close in that respect? Oh yeah, I golf, so once in a while I’ll go golfing with some of the officers, there is still that, a bunch of the guys went on a hiking trip, well, it has to be the guys because the wives are not going to want female officers, so they can do that, and the females said, because there are seven of us, well we went on a white water rafting trip. So you still have that, where, if I went out, lets say all the guys went out after work and played cards or whatever, if I went I am sure their wives would still say ‘oh what is she...’ so that part. We do as a department, we do a lot sometimes where we get together and whoever wants to show up and play volleyball or whatever, those situations are good, but you can’t get that intimate where the guys are sitting around the table talking, you can’t get that, with the
females we have that, and sometimes we will all get together and all go out. That is one thing, but if it is a small group of guys and you have the female officer there, I think their spouses and girlfriends, that is tension right there. I think that is one thing that causes... but we do a lot together, but like I said there are certain things where you are still going to have that division just because of the different sexes...

MN   The nature of it all.
LB   Exactly.
MN   Do you think your experiences on the force have been different than that of men?
LB   Yes, especially in Holland. I know Holland is very conservative, I grew up in Muskegon, which is a little more liberal, I mean on the east side of the state it is a lot more liberal, like right now, in the whole county there is only one female supervisor, out of all the departments in the county. And even for minorities in here, I mean, we have had some officers who have had some situation where someone is not going to open the door for them because they are a minority, as a police officer. I think that is changing too, but it is taking a long time for Holland. I came in 1990, '91, when the gangs were first, so I was just added extra because of the gang problem. No matter where you go there is still going to be, especially males that are going to say 'hey, you can’t tell me what to do.’ I have not really come across that much, but still, it is very conservative around here, and I know a lot of the women around here stay at home, which is great, I think women who stay at home with their children, that’s what they should do, but, it is a hard struggle, because I don’t think you can do it all. I think men can do it all, just
because that is the way it has always been. Women, you cannot do it all once. You can’t raise a family, I don’t think, and get your education, you can’t work, because something is going to lack. So, as females, we have to give up a lot. Like I said, that one officer had to give up her career to go home with her kids. If you work full time and have kids, that is hard too, because you are not spending time with your kids. I personally don’t. I really never wanted kids. One reason, I don’t know if it is because of the job, because I want to be able to dedicate to the job, and be a mother, so that is why I do a lot of the extra things.

MN  How have you seen the department change from when you became an officer, till now?

LB  In general?

MN  In general, what have you seen change?

LB  I think with our department, the diversity. When I first got here, everybody was from Holland, they were Christian Reformed, went to Holland Christian, now they are getting people, we have a lot of people who are from different cities, different states, different backgrounds, so I think that is one thing that has changed a lot in this department for the better. Because you reflect of the department, and they are very good, the department, at hiring, I mean they have the best people, and a good amount of Spanish speaking officers, females which is a good mix which I reflective of the community. What was I going to say, what was your question?

MN  About how the department has changed…
LB Changed... so I think in that respect it has changed, another way it has changed, another way it has changed, we have kept up with the times, this department, for a small department, we have 60 officers, we have the negotiation team, we have the tactical team, we have evidence techs, we have traffic, we have schools, we have so many different options for us, as officers to grow and get into different fields. When I first started they didn’t have these, they had these, but they didn’t have all these different positions. We have a booking position, I can go on and on with the positions we have and they have just been progressive. They have really, cutting edge, and all that, our field training program, they took a chance on that. So they are very progressive, we have good equipment, and they have kept up with it, now with the funding cuts, but they are still, they are definitely trying to keep up and give us the best they can and the city council is very supportive of us and they think the community is very supportive of the Holland Police. I don’t know if it was like that years ago, I can’t say, but I feel that compared to some of the cities I hear, they are very supportive of what we do, and that is very important to have the city council backing you and the community backing you, because the community has done a lot for us. A lot of the different city ordinances changed because of the community, because of the neighborhood watch program. They have really helped us stay up with the times? And we are very progressive, I think we are one of the more progressive in the state, especially for a small department.

MN Has working for the Holland Police Department affected your values or you standards in any way?
I don’t think at all. I was raised as a very responsible person. It hasn’t changed at all, it just gave me a new perspective that I am thankful for what I do have. Thankful for the family I did grow up in. A lot of people, you see them and you know they don’t have a chance, because of their family. I don’t think, I have always tried to stay the same, what I have been, it has just given me a new perspective on things I guess.

Change in outlook.

Very changed in outlook. That is better for me, a lot of people go through life and don’t realize what really goes on. I grew up in a nice family, so you don’t really get to see the other side of things, so it really gives me a different perspective and makes me appreciate what I do have.

Could you describe your beat, your beat is Hope College right?

Now we have 3 sections of the city--Adam, Baker, and Charlie, so I cover the whole Adam area, which is 24th street north to the railroad tracks all the way west. [Draws imaginary diagram on table] It is probably the smallest area out of the three areas, but is probably the most concentrated. But then, Hope College is still my main, so if I am working, I will be the primary call taker for the Hope College area, before team policing, that was my area, I got all the complaints that went on there. I still am like that, but I work the whole Adam area, and people now assist me more in my area, myself and another officer kind of swap, he is always the second call person in my call area, and I am a second for him.

Who’s he?
LB Officer DeKleine, he has by the Columbia one stop area. We both have 16th street. I have 16th street north, he has 16th street south, but I still have Hope College as my area. If something happened, put it this way, if something happens in that area, I take it more personally because it is like, I have tried for the last five years to try to... and I don't and you want them to help on their own, but if there's landlord problems, I will take more time in that area, and work on problems, and problem solving things.

MN So you feel you have a sense of ownership?

LB Oh yes, definitely. That's the key thing right there is the ownership, and I think the new officers who work in their areas, same thing, if you hear there is a shooting you are concerned anywhere it happens, but if you hear it happens in your area, you are like who is it, because you get to know these people. Or you want to know what is going on, is there something I can do. You do take a lot more ownership.

MN Do you think that is a big result of community policing and team policing?

LB Yes. I think officers, if you ask them, do they take more ownership now, it would be interesting to see what they would say. The officers that are assigned to teams now since October, it would be interesting to hear what they have to say about it. Because I know you could have the community officers, and its, when we went to community policing, not more stressful, you go home, and you problems are still there, when you are a regular on the road, you take care of the problem, you leave, you don't have to worry about it. Well I am going to hear from these people
again and again and again, so it is more stressful in that way, you take it home with you more it think.

MN  So you get to, also get to know a lot of the people on your beat better.

LB  A lot more people, and that is a positive thing.

MN  Very much! What do you think the difference from before till community policing and team policing now?

LN  Team police, or just when community policing started.

MN  Maybe both, what is the evolution from traditional patrol, to community, to team policing, what do you think happened through those transitions?

LN  Well, when we were on the regular patrol we were almost all reactive. I am going to take the call, our window that is smashed, you report, I am leaving. When you start doing to community policing, you because a lot more proactive. Whatever happened in my area, I got all the reports, so if say on the corner there was in a month’s time there were ten car larcenies, I can work on that problem. Because otherwise you have all these people taking one call that, and I might have only taken one call there, but I know what I going on in my area. So I know I can work on that problem. I think a lot that has happened is we have worked with landlords which is a key thing, because environmental health issues really tie into police issues, it is just the nature of the beast. So we have been working a lot with environmental health and agencies making referrals. If I go to a complaint that is a neighbor complaint, I spend a lot of time there, but there is really nothing I can do, but I can refer you to the center for mediation, it is free. So we get to know a lot about the referral system. So what us law enforcement can’t take care of,
someone else can take care of. Instead of leaving them and saying there is nothing we can do, we give them options. So that is really helped out a lot. Getting to know the people, that way if there is a drug house, going in and out, lets work on that problem, see if we can get environmental health, set up stings, we can do bike patrol, so I think that is really the evolution, with that. We go out and do bike safety programs, we do a lot of programs, which it’s good, it’s a positive thing, and they like us out there, we go to their block parties, they love it. So instead of seeing a police officer knocking at your door and your thinking now what did I do? It’s like, “oh it’s officer Bancuk, how are you doing today?” Because before if an officer came and knocked on your door the first thing you think of is “oh, what did I do wrong?” Now it is like, I want to find out what has been going on. So it’s breaking a lot of barriers.

MN That is really positive. So what’s your history personally with community policing?

LB There were three community police officers at first, so I have been on there for 6 years, I started out, they start with three areas, and they expanded it to six, and I was in that second phase of community policing. And it was a struggle because officers think “what are you doing, spending your time out with Lincoln School students when I am out busting my butt taking calls.” They didn’t understand the whole philosophy, hopefully these kids that I am playing with, when they grow up with a different perception of the community. [Side A ends]
MN  So how do you work to make that, you talk about on the playgrounds, that is just officer Bancuk coming over to see how you are doing, how do you work to make that connection with the community as an officer or as a team?

LB  Just as you are what, bike patrol, if they are out mowing their lawn you just stop up and talk to them and say “hey what are your concerns in the neighborhood?” And when you talk to people and find out, its not gangs, it is not drugs, that is not their main concern, it’s I have a neighbor next door and their trash can is out all the time and they won’t bring it in, or their dog and it is the simple things that hey, I didn’t think about those things, and those are the things that we want to take care of because, okay there’s a little trash thing, well then what happens when they start arguing with the neighbors. Its those little things and getting to know them, and now I think the community knows that and it has been around long enough that everybody is really familiar with community policing, but we wanted to make it a whole departmental wide, we wanted a philosophy for everyone to think “when I go to this call, I might have to be there again tomorrow so let me try an figure it out today, I may refer it to somebody else, but then I won’t have to go back to this one house because their next door neighbor has their abandoned car out back.” Oh, I know, environmental health can take care of that. So I think that is a whole philosophy that almost everybody is having now. It is hard at first, and when we move into this team policing it was hard, especially for officers that had been there for a long time, it is like, I want to go out and take names and arrest people, that is what I became a police officer for. Well, people don’t realize, if you take care of these little problems, simple problems, you have more
time to go out there and get the drunk drivers, you have more time to be proactive and do your own patrol things. And I think it is going very well, the team policing. We have team meetings…

MN  What kind of effects have you seen, is it too early to see the effects of team policing?

LB  It's a little too early, but the communication, I can definitely tell. When I go on, we have books I read, and I find out what was going on the night before. So if someone calls, I can say, 'oh yeah, that's right, I remember last week that you…' or the communication I really a key thing. Just to get to know their areas, I think that the officers are getting to know their areas a lot better. And hopefully this summer, they will be on bike patrol, and they will get to be involved in a lot more proactive things. So I think is going well, it is a little too early to tell the whole thing, but the communication is one thing people complain about in training, we have a lot more training.

MN  In what ways can the Holland Community get involved in things?

LB  The neighborhood watch is the key thing. Even if, I’ll tell you what, if I went to certain blocks and had a block meeting, there are five people there. If you had a shooting the night before, there would be a hundred people there that day, so we have to let people understand, at least keep involved, you never know when you are going to need something, it is not just after something happens, but their blocks are pretty organized, we work with the city on that, and organizing blocks for someone who does that. But I think that’s the key thing, is to call 911, they can help out community policing, if you see somebody suspicious, call us, you are
not bothering us. I think a lot of people have that philosophy, “oh we are bugging the police,” you pay for our service, we want to go out there and take calls, we want to go out there and talk to people, have a reason to stop people. So I think they can really be proactive in getting involved and getting to know their neighbors, so when something happens across the street they will know, “I have never seen that car there before, no one is home” so I think that is what the community can do to help us out.

MN  How long have you worked the Hope College area, that beat?

LB  I think six years.

MN  Do you know anything about the history, even beyond your work there, the history of the relationship between the police and the college?

LB  Yes, when I first started it was the very basics of, there were a lot of big parties happening at Hope College, so what I tried to do when I first started to get in there, I worked with Hope College, I don’t want to take over, because they still have their own area, but they overlap. If something happens on the street, on the sidewalk it is ours, even though it is a dorm. So what I did is worked with Hope College and set up programs when the school first starts, we are going to be out there and if you are drinking alcohol underage, you are going to get a ticket, so tell them what the new laws were that were coming out, so they were informed, and if I go to a call I said “hey we told you that we are going to be doing this,” and it helps out a lot, parties are a lot smaller, I have them contact their neighbors if they are going to have a party, keep the party small, so I have had this program that I try to do every year, talk to the RAs at the dorms so they can distribute the
information, so I don’t think it was that intent, I don’t think Hope College really
looked pro actively with law enforcement, so I think it is a good thing we are
working with them, we are trying to get them involved in our training. I stop by
there every once in a while just to see what is going on, I have a link to their
website.

MN So do you work with campus police regularly?

LB Yes.

MN What kinds of things do you cooperate on?

LB Really everything, if there is a big crime or let’s say there is, for while there they
had a lot of cars being damaged, broken into. So we, in their parking lot, but it is
in the city so we can do just as much and we can help them out. We have more
resources than they do, so we help them out.

MN That’s good. So what kind of role do you take as an officer on the campus?

LB I am more of a liaison when it happens on campus, and more of an informational
for the students. Watch the parties, keep them small, it is just for the whole
community, Grand Valley you can go out and no one cares if you have a big
party, no one is going to call up. But in Holland, there are people next door who
have to get up at five o’clock in the morning, they have a family, so just to let
them realize that, it is more of an educational thing I am doing with Hope
College. And liaison with their department, so communication, continues, and I
know the dean there pretty well. So if anything comes up, we forward any copies
that we deal with Hope College students right to them. And we tell them, ‘hey, if
I get a report that you are drinking, and you are on the football team, they are
going to find out about. If you are not on the football team, they are going to find out about it.’ We are not lying to them. I think that has helped over the years. We don’t have the big parties like we used to. Every once in a while you still do, you can’t stop everything.

MN So partying is probably a typical situation that you run into and have to work with, what other kinds of typical situations do you run into, at Hope College?

LB I guess with Hope, when I talk to Hope College, it happens on the campus, a lot of harassment type things. Little larcenies of stolen bikes. I’d say it is mostly the parties, the drinking, that’s just about it. Really there is not a lot, every once in a while you have them being involved in a little more than that, drugs and we have an undercover team that will be refereed, ‘why don’t you watch this dorm’ and we have even had our dogs go through, so we have our canine, so that has really helped a lot too. We are telling them, and Hope College, overall is very cooperative with us and want to work with us also. If they have a major crime, they don’t have an evidence tech, they don’t have what they need to do fingerprinting, so we would not even hesitate to go over there and help them out and take over or assist them in any way we can.

MN Has community policing affected Hope College? Team Policing affected the Hope College beat?

LB When we first started community policing, yes. And now, even though I have a bigger area, I still think that it still going to be the same, so it definitely affected it. Because there was one person who took control and did not let these parties get out of hand, because if there are big parties, it is kind of a reflection on me, and
what are you trying to do to resolve this, so it makes me even more aware of what is going on? And there was party on Fairbanks, a while ago, a big party, and the next week I was over there talking to them: who is your landlord? How many people are living here? I tell you what we are going to be watching you, the neighbors are going to call, so going there afterward it happened saying “if this happens again we are going to take a little more action.”

MN What other kinds of prevention with those kinds of situations are there, what kinds of things do you as an officer do?

LB Just mostly the classes, self-defense classes, education classes, stings, we do a lot of that. Saying hey, we are going to get some of our cadets that look like they are, and we are going in there and if they are selling alcohol, we’ll get them for that, it is a felony, one of those different things. Make them communicate with their neighbors. You don’t have to get to know them, if you just go over and introduce yourself, that goes a long way. Your neighbor is going to think twice about calling the police if you go and introduce yourself if you go and introduce yourself to them when you first move in. They will call you first, and hopefully the problem will be taken care of before you call us. So I think that is the key thing right there.

MN What do you think the challenges are working with the students and the college?

LB As a private institution, they have their own guides and regulations and we have ours. Lets say you have someone who is the star on the football team and you write him for an MIP, minor in possession, that could be an issue right there. It is their main star, but they are very cooperative and they do the communication, and
it is a different environment there, Hope College, than a city government. You have to go through different, you have your board of trustees there and then you have the deans you have to work with, so it is a different structure, and sometime that is challenging. And some of the rules and regulations that I have to know what is different than ours, I don’t think they go under city, I think they go under state laws so, we help them out but...

MN Do students generally understand their rights and the laws and things like that?

LB Every student knows everything! That is another challenge, “I have a dad that’s an attorney,” “I have a mom that is an attorney,” everyone has someone that is an attorney, and when you are dealing with Hope College you have money issues there, and most people that go there have... so it like, I am just going to pay it off and get my way out of it. I try to explain to them, if you have a misdemeanor on your record, that could be the difference between you getting a job or not getting a job. Even if it is a little minor in possession of alcohol thing. So you try to say, you have to think about those kinds of things. I think that is a struggle too is that Hope College they think they can just pay their way out of a lot things and get out of it...

MN …and that is not reality.

LB But sometimes it is unfortunately, when you have money.

MN Is there a difference working with the students than with the community, do you find?

LB Yes, because they are temporary, they are so transitional, they don’t take that ownership. If you had a house you would take care of the lawn, you take care of
it because you live there. Them, hey I am paying for it, they don’t take that ownership, “next year I am not even going to be here.” I find that difficult. So they are what, 17 through 21, their whole philosophy is different at that age, they are going to have fun, get through school, they don’t think about the future, they think about tomorrow. That’s the whole thing too, and just the ownership part of it, transition.

MN I have one last question, if you could get up and yell into a horn and tell everybody in the community how to get involved, what opportunities there are, what would you tell them?

LB Just to get involved and make the community a better place? Well, I am from Muskegon, and I will tell you, for a bigger city, there are not nearly as many opportunities, I’d just give them a list, we have so many opportunities to get involved with youth if they want to, senior citizens if you want to. You can get involved with the police academy, you can get involved with Hope College, there are so many opportunities for people, and if everybody just did a little bit, and I tell them, be suspicious of things, don’t hesitate to call 911, and don’t think that you are going to be bothering us. When I go to my neighborhood meetings that is what I tell them. You are not bothering us, people apologize all the time when they call, ‘I am sorry for calling’ but that is why we are here, just the way the system is. 911 seems like such a bad thing, you have to call it if someone is dying or if there were a bad accident. I just wish that philosophy would change. We are here for you, you are not imposing on us. I think that, just get involved in your neighborhood, even though nothing is going on in your neighborhood, it is fine,
we want to keep it that way, so just have a calling tree where if something happens, like let’s say they know something, you have this, hopefully it is going to be city wide, I don’t know if you have heard of this, kind of a reverse 911 system. And what that is going to be is anywhere in the city we can program, say last night we had a suicidal subject with gasoline, it is not in effect yet, but what we could do is program the numbers in that are around that block and call them and let them know, get out of your house, or let’s say we are having a neighborhood meeting, we could call a certain group and say hey, we are having this meeting if you if you want to go. So that is one reason, how we are working with neighbors too. Or, there has been a lot of larcenies in your area, with motor vehicles make sure, like public service announcements so we are going to hopefully utilize that soon. So I think that will be a good thing for the community also.

MN  How do you think the Holland community perceives the Holland police?
LB  Very positive. You have the ones that see the police all the time in negative situations. But people are so friendly, they are so willing to help out, they are willing for witnesses to wait in accidents, and that is the other thing I wish people would do. You see these specials on the nighttime channels and stuff, oh if I report than people are going to come after and get me, retaliation. I have never seen that in 11 years. You see that in gang situations, but that is the way they live. But I wished people would be willing to take that effort to stop and fill out statement form, and I wish the whole process would be easier for them, because you come to court, half the time it doesn’t go, you have to take off of work. The whole process is what I would like to work on is have them get involved but once
they are involved make it easy for them, so that they are going to be willing to do it again, all the way from the prosecutor all the way down to the police officer who takes the original call. Take time with this person for the prosecutor, talk to this person, at least get their input, and if it doesn’t happen that way, at least they think they have had a whole process.

MN What your experience with the gangs been like?

LB We have some officers who know them inside out. They have grown up here, they know the whole history. I know the basics, I know what to look for, the colors, I know most of the gang members, the ones coming up. The ones on probation, so there’s more people that know more than I do, but if somebody is walking down the street I can probably tell if they are a gang member or not. And we have computer systems in our car where we can pull up people and find out gang intelligence, and we are trying to do that a lot more. Gather intelligence, who they are hanging out with. What colors they are wearing. The gangs, we are keeping on top of that too. But it is a problem and we have got to continue. It is not something that has happened and has gone. It is an ongoing process, and it always will be. Unfortunately.

MN Is there anything I might have missed?

LB I think we have covered everything. And like I said, I love my job, and I love coming into work everyday. I think a lot of people feel that way here and hopefully we can keep up with that for the new people coming on, that is one reason why I like being involved in field training, to show them the positive things, because it’s so easy for people to complain in life. It is not perfect, if I
have an issue I will bring it up because it has to be resolved, but overall try to
make it a good place to work for everybody.

[end tape]
Late-night standoff ends after suicidal woman threatens to burn down house

Thursday June 6, 2002

A Holland woman who police say doused herself and her College Avenue apartment in gasoline and threatened to commit suicide Tuesday night was under psychiatric care Wednesday.

The Holland Police Department tactical team was stationed outside the home for more than six hours Tuesday night and Wednesday morning after 35-year-old Linda Salas became despondent and talked of suicide, police say.

Capt. Bob DeVries and Paul Heineman said Salas was taken to Holland Community Hospital at about 6 a.m. Wednesday after being talked out of her residence at 363 College Ave., near 15th Street.

DeVries said negotiators used a phone at a neighbor's residence to contact Salas and convince her to leave her apartment, which is in a rental house on the southeast corner of the intersection.

"The negotiators did a great job of talking to her and trying to reason with her that there was a better way to handle her problems," DeVries said.

Police are unsure how much gas Salas dumped around the apartment, but said fuel fumes could be smelled at the scene. Heineman said enough gas was used that the house could easily have gone up in flames. Salas said she was going to strike a match to light the fire.

DeVries said Salas would undergo an evaluation at the hospital, but it was unclear how long she would be held.

"With these types of situations, our first concern is the person's safety and the safety of those immediately around the house," he said. "The doctors are going to have to determine what type of a threat she is to herself and to others."

Click here to return to story: