



ATHENS POLICE DEPARTMENT

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

"To make Athens a safe and comfortable place to live, work, and raise a family."

Honor, Courage, Service, Excellence

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF OF POLICE



Unprecedented. Challenging. Any of these would be apt descriptions of the year we find ourselves looking back on. 2020 showcased a pandemic unseen in our lifetime. It affected everyone. It also marked a rash of public unrest that followed a heinous in-custody death of a man in Minnesota. George Floyd's tragic death spurred protests across the nation, and the law enforcement profession found itself reckoning with demands for reform.

In looking back at my preface for the last annual report, I find it filled with ambitious hope that 2020 would be a year where the Police Department looked at ways to drastically improve safety and quality of life in the community. Though we did make progress in some areas, much of the year felt more like a fight just to make it to the next day.

It was a challenging year to be a police chief, to say the least. But I suspect that I will look back on this part of my life with a great deal of thankfulness. I was fortunate to witness the citizens of Athens to come together peacefully, where friends and neighbors could share their collective pain and discuss potential solutions to the challenges our nation faces. I was blessed to witness countless people take time out of their busy schedules to make sure our department knew they appreciated us. Most of all, I was privy to witness the incredible resolve of the men and women of the Athens Police Department who suited up and came to work during one of the most stressful years ever for law enforcement.

I hope this report provides you with helpful information about what is important to your police department, as well as our accomplishments and the challenges we face. Most of all, I hope you can read it and be proud of the hard work that the officers of this department have put into keeping your community safe during the prior year. I certainly am.

Clifton D. Couch
Chief of Police

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020

Community Relations

2020 posed unprecedented challenges to our commitment to community policing. Like many agencies, the Athens Police Department purposely limited contact with the public to help reduce the risk of spreading Covid. This flies in the face of our usual posture toward community contact.

Many of our usual programs were put on hold. Bike Patrols and Foot Patrols were largely discontinued. The annual Coffee with a Cop event was postponed. The interactions we have with local children were largely interrupted as schools switched to distance learning.

Despite these challenges, our relationship with the community flourished. Businesses, civic groups, and individual families showed up in masse to care for our officers during the pandemic. Local pharmacies donated manufactured and donated hand sanitizer. Businesses donated masks and other personal protective equipment. But most of all, the community showered the Department with cards, meals, and encouragement.

Shop with a Cop

Thanks to a generous invitation from our friends at the McMinn County Sheriff's Office, we have participated in the local "Shop with a Cop" program for the last several years. Every year, around Christmas, kids who need a little help from Santa are paired with local law enforcement officers to check off their Christmas list at the Athens Wal Mart.

Despite the ongoing need to limit public gatherings because of public health concerns, the organizers were able to hold a socially distanced version of the Shop with a Cop program in 2020. We continue to be grateful for the people who organize this event and include us each year.

Student Resource Officer Program

In late 2017, the City of Athens was approached by the Athens City Schools with a request to assign an SRO to the school system. By early 2018, arrangements were made, and an officer was assigned to the school system. Under this arrangement, Athens City Schools and The City of Athens share the expenses associated with assigning an officer full-time to the school system.

In this role, the Student Resource Officer works to keep the schools safe and develop positive relationships with the students there. The benefit of this relationship goes beyond the role of one



officer. In their role as liaison, the SRO can connect the school system with the training, resources, and manpower of the APD.

2020 was a tricky year for both schools and law enforcement, as the pandemic made it difficult to gather in crowds. Despite this, officers were able to spend *some* time with the children of Athens City Schools.

Emergency Response Improvements

As much as we would prefer for all our interactions to be pleasant ones, police are usually the first on the scene when things go bad. APD is committed to being fully prepared to professionally handle any bad situation, and we are putting a lot of time into getting where we need to be.

Special Weapons and Tactics (S.W.A.T.)

As of several years ago, APD's emergency response team had essentially gone defunct. Since then, the Department has invested a tremendous amount of time and resources into getting this unit back on its feet and ready to defend the public.

Thanks to the hard work of the team leadership, a rigorous try-put process was established to ensure the suitability of applicants. Once a month, officers take time to train for this part-time function, in addition to all their regular duties.



In addition, Crisis Negotiation Officers were added to the team. Individuals in these roles all received advanced training in how to successfully work with suspects to peacefully resolve dangerous situations.

Like other types of training, SWAT Training was absolutely affected at the start of the pandemic. The Department had to find ways to work around the dangers presented by the virus, and ultimately found ways to continue improving the quality of this essential service.

CIT Training

At one point during 2019, officers found themselves dealing with a man in a mental health crisis. He had made threats to harm himself and others, and then showed up a local fast-food restaurant. He pulled a knife on patrol officers who responded.

After securing the area and communicating with the suspect for several hours, officers were able to resolve the situation without anyone getting hurt. This wouldn't have been possible without the newly trained SWAT Team and Crisis Negotiators. *However, there was also another factor at play.*

For years, law enforcement agencies around the country have been embracing the idea of CIT. CIT is Crisis Intervention Training that teaches officers on the street how to better handle situations with folks in mental distress.

In 2020, it was difficult to obtain valuable training (such as CIT) for officers. Many conferences and schools were shuttered for a time. By the end of the year, however, the agency was able to continue sending officers to this valuable training.

Fighting the Drug Problem/ Problem Oriented Policing

In order to maximize our ability to address drug issues in the community, APD participates in the 10th Judicial District's Drug Task Force.

The Department utilizes an approach to law enforcement called "Problem Oriented Policing". In POP, agencies try to identify specific underlying issues that are contributing to ongoing crime problems. In this spirit, it was determined that a dilapidated extended hotel called the Athens Lodge was the site of numerous calls for service, including multiple drug overdoses. Working with the Drug Task Force, APD was able to gather enough information for the 10th Judicial District Attorney General's Office to obtain a court order that shut the Athens Lodge down. The structure was eventually sold to a new owner and is currently undergoing renovation.



This type of focused policing (and cooperation with other agencies) allows us to make the most of our resources to make Athens a safe and comfortable place to live.

Working with Our Friends and Neighbors

Like most of the country in 2020, Athens found itself discussing racial issues, especially as they relate to policing. Unlike many places, however, the conversations and events in our community tended to be peaceful and productive.

Several demonstrations took place in Athens in the wake of the death of George Floyd. None of them were anything other than peaceful. In fact, the organizers graciously included our department in several of them.

The largest event that took place was organized by individuals and organizations in the community. The City of Athens offered Cook Park as a venue. Numerous speakers were featured. Finally, members of the audience were able to pose questions to local law enforcement officials and express concerns they might have related to policing.

It was not an easy time, and difficult conversations took place. Ultimately, though, Athens came out stronger for it.

Thankfully, the handful of meetings that took place were not the end. Various community groups have continued to meet and discuss these important issues. They have graciously allowed the Athens Police Department to continue being part of these discussions.

STATS AND NUMBERS FROM 2020

2020 Stats

**These numbers are from Department internal records. They may be slightly different from official TBI Stats that come out later this year, due to minor differences in categorization rules, records-keeping, etc.*

According to TBI statistics, the Athens Police Department's Case Clearance Rate in 2020 was approximately 53%.

Calls for Service

Total:	17,773
False Alarm Calls:	518

Traffic Stops and Citations:

Traffic Citations Issued:	1,200
Traffic Stops Conducted:	854
Warnings Issued:	753
Driver Ethnicity:	
Caucasian-	733
African American-	76
Hispanic-	38
Asian-	5
Other-	2

Municipal Court Data

Municipal Cases Litigated:	504
Municipal Court Cases Dismissed:	107
Cases Dismissed with paid Court Cost:	138

Arrest Data

Total Arrested Persons (other than drugs):	887
Athens Residents:	669
McMinn County Residents:	309
Residency Outside McMinn County:	242
Total Drug Arrests:	355
Arrests from Traffic Stops:	286
Arrests from Traffic Crash Investigations:	65

Drug Seizure Data **This does not include data from APD's Drug Task Force Officer*

	Number of Seizures
Prescription Drugs:	82
Marijuana:	346
Meth:	169
Opioids (Heroin, Fentanyl, etc)	35
Cocaine	6

