

THE MULTI-FACETED ROLE OF MIAMI-DADE POLICE DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR CARLOS ALVAREZ

Miami-Dade County covers more than one thousand square miles with a multi-cultural population of more than 2.5 million people. The community profile is 69% white; 20% Black or African American; 57% Hispanic (67% speak a language other than English); 24% are 18 and under; 13% are 65 years or older. The county's population is growing at 1.6% a year and 23% over a ten-year period. This montage of diverse cultures, interests and lifestyles is the domain of Miami-Dade County Police Department Director Carlos Alvarez.

On March 31, 1997, Carlos Alvarez was appointed Director serving more than 21 years in public service and law enforcement. He was appointed as Chief of the Central Operations Division in 1989 and Assistant Director in 1992. For his professional work and dedication, he has received numerous community awards. Director Alvarez is a native of Cuba, arriving in the United States with his family at age 8.

Miami-Dade County is the "gateway to South America" with Miami International Airport serving 93 airlines from all over the world. Within the police jurisdiction of the MDPD is the City of Miami and other smaller municipalities that operate their own police departments. Formerly called the Metro-Dade Sheriff's department until 1998, the County Commission redesignated the 3,100 sworn deputies to serve in a dual role as the metropolitan Miami-Dade Police Department.

MDPD PRIORITIES

In forecasting the most important concerns over the next decade, Director Alvarez places Homeland Security as the number one priority.

Homeland Security is “an issue paramount to all law enforcement,” says Director Alvarez. The MDPD has launched a Homeland Security unit to coordinate preparedness training in a potential terrorist incident. As part of the money earmarked in the HS Act for “first responders,” the department purchased biohazard suits and equipment for officers as well as advanced technology. The federal government has not yet reimbursed the MDPD for these purchases, stated the Director.

The emphasis on the Department’s Homeland Security preparedness is mobilization of manpower to key locations such as the seaport, airport, water/sewer treatment plants and transportation hubs. “The MDPD is a labor intensive unit that requires large sums of money and equipment to act quickly and respond appropriately in a terrorist threat situation to prevent a catastrophic event,” said Director Alvarez. Should there be the release of an airborne pathogen or chemical hazard, the MDPD is prepared to handle whatever could occur with a specific plan of action.

Chief Alvarez said that the department follows standard procedure in handling individuals suspected of committing a crime or terrorist activity by obtaining a court

order, signed by a judge, to pursue further investigation. “The MPDD,” says Director Alvarez, “is not in the business of violating constitutional rights.”

Under the Homeland Security Act, the FBI is designated as the lead agency over local law enforcement in handling a terrorist situation. Some police officials have criticized the FBI in the past for not sharing investigative information and overshadowing police authority. Director Alvarez disagrees, “The reciprocity of information to local law enforcement agencies has not been a problem for me. Sharing of information amongst agencies is crucial. It is a collaborative effort to prevent a crime before it occurs. Over the past five years of my tenure, I have had a very good working relationship with the Miami area FBI Bureau Chief Hector Pesquera and other local, state and federal agencies.”

Beyond the safety concerns imposed by 9/11, the MDPD was confronted with the heightened security of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) conference held November 20-21 in downtown Miami. Although City of Miami Police Chief John Timoney orchestrated the event, the MDPD fine-tuned their riot control skills to handle the more than 10,000 people who participated in demonstrations against the multi-national trade agreement conference and the possible permanent location of the FTAA Secretariat in Miami.

MDPD officers rehearsed strategies for six months in advance of the event in full riot gear including full body armor and shields to protect themselves from protestors trained

to break through law enforcement security. The cost of training for the two-day event was estimated at \$4 to \$8 million dollars in overtime pay.

The MDPD motorcycle unit, bomb squad, patrol units and other manpower were stationed at major staging points to protect the safety of motorists, citizens, property and peaceful protestors. Alvarez attributes the major disturbance during the FTAA event to approximately 500 self-proclaimed “anarchists” who espoused anti-globalization slogans and a return to an agrarian society. The informal group, Alvarez explained, was comprised of people from all over the country: Maryland, PA, New Hampshire, and Los Angeles. Colorado and Michigan. They are a loosely formed group that communicates regularly in coordinating anti-globalization protests in cities hosting foreign trade conferences.”

A number of local law enforcement agencies trained together to prevent a repeat occurrence of the Seattle disturbance in Miami where injuries resulted and property was destroyed. “I was in the area of conflict in downtown Miami from the start, and there when it ended. The protesters were given a First Amendment area in which to demonstrate and those who refused to abide by a lawful order were arrested,” said Director Alvarez. There were 130 protesters arrested on misdemeanor charges, paid bond and were released. Alvarez added, “MDPD officers were well trained, organized and supervised, they did not use rubber bullets and there was only one accidental use of pepper spray resulting in injuries.” He said MDPD demonstrated a professional vigilance and restraint that was very difficult to maintain with protestors purposely attempting to

provoke them. Despite the aggressive tactics of the “self-proclaimed anarchists, Director Alvarez said police investigations, prior to the event, did not link protestors to terrorist organizations.

Another priority of the MDPD under Director Alvarez’ leadership is to continue the downward trend in violent crimes. In the highly populated metropolis, there were 38 homicides, down 38% between 1996 and 2003. Overall, Part I violent crimes were down 5% in 2002-03 and 39% between 1996-2003. Part I non-violent crimes were also down 38% in 1996-2003 with a 2% reduction in the six-month period of 2002-03. Although visitor robberies rose 177% in a six-month period in 2002-2003, or 7 cases, there was a downturn of 81% between 1996-2003. Alvarez stresses that reducing crime has a positive impact on improving the quality of life for all residents. The department is committed “to promoting a safe and secure environment free from crime and the fear of crime.”

Another goal Director Alvarez emphasizes is restoring faith in government. He said the MDPD will continue to bring to justice elected or government officials who commit crimes. The department will seek out those individuals who destroy public confidence by involvement in corruption, bribery and other white-collar crimes.

The MPDP strives “to practice core values of integrity, respect, service and fairness. The leadership of Director Alvarez is summarized in the department’s Mission Statement: “Integrity is the hallmark of the Miami-Dade Police Department and we are committed to the highest performance standards, ethical conduct and truthfulness in all relationships.

We hold ourselves accountable for our actions and take pride in a professional level of service to all.”