FROM THE CHIEF

Baton Rouge, we truly appreciate your contributions to making this community safer through unprecedented times. The COVID 19 pandemic impacted communities worldwide and many lives were lost.

However, because of your compliance, the great work of our healthcare professionals and first responders, many lives were saved. This team work is a testament to the resiliency of our Baton Rouge community. We thank you for making the selfless sacrifices needed to ensure the well-being of your fellow community members, and ask you to continue complying with the most recent guidelines set forth.

The unfortunate incidents in Minneapolis are not only trending on social media, but the anger, pain and conversations have made it’s way to communities across our Nation. As your Chief, I share in America’s outrage over the death of Mr. George Floyd. The video of Mr. Floyd’s death is shocking to the conscious. One of our responsibilities as law enforcement officers is the protection of life. Life is so precious! Our training and policies must emphasize de-escalation and the sanctity of human life.

The Baton Rouge Police Department began reform efforts in 2017 when Mayor-President Broome took office. Many of the reform changes being considered by law enforcement agencies and demanded in state and Federal legislation already exist in the Baton Rouge Police Department. Although progress has been made, we understand there’s continuous work that needs to be done to meet your expectations.

Our efforts yielded reductions in crime over the past two years, as well as gained confidence in our ability to do our jobs. In 2019 we invested in new technology to bolster our ability to keep you safe. As an agency, we are working harder to do better with existing resources. We recently completed an efficiency study that provides best practice recommendations in law enforcement.

In 2019, we increased staffing in our recruiting section. We are experiencing advancements in young adults’ eager to become public servants in law enforcement. On June 1, 2020, 29 highly-motivated men and women began their training as members of the 86th Basic Training Academy to become Baton Rouge Police Officers.

Our 2019 turnover ratio is the lowest it’s been in the past five years. Through improvements in our recruiting efforts, recommendations from the efficiency study and smart deployment strategies, we will have more boots on the ground in 2020 then we’ve had in years.

It is my great honor to serve as your Police Chief. This is a privilege I hold in high regard. “Keep Talking Baton Rouge, We Will Never Stop Listening,” is a motto I’ve repeated since being blessed with the opportunity to be your Chief. We’re still listening and we receive what you are saying. We have learned to become patient listeners with our police officers as we include them in the decision making process. We were all ears as we sat in community listening sessions at our district offices with our Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome.

We listened in meetings with our downtown business community. We’ve received understanding and have felt compassion as we listened to family members who lost loved ones to violence in our city. We’ve also heard you in our conversations during our Chief’s Advisory Council meetings.

Baton Rouge we want to sincerely thank you for actively participating in our efforts to reduce crime reduction in our wonderful city. We truly appreciate you encouraging us to be better at our craft. We are stronger together.

Chief Murphy J. Paul Jr.

PRECISION POLICING

Technology that gives Baton Rouge detectives new precision in disrupting and responding to crime is a critical factor in declining crime rates across the city. But a surge in tips from members of the community is also an important factor in significant drops in homicides, rapes, robberies and other major crimes in Baton Rouge between 2017 and 2019.

"New technology shows us the ‘hot spots’ where we need to focus our resources,” said Chief of Detectives Mike Manning of the department’s Criminal Investigations Bureau. “But the public for 2019 really stepped up,” Manning added. “People are sick of crime in their neighborhoods and they’re more comfortable calling us with information.”

Instead of blanketing entire neighborhoods with officers—a strategy known as “zero tolerance”—the tech-driven strategy allows detectives to focus on the small number of perpetrators who account for most violent crime in the city. Analytical tools harness data to indicate the most effective way to use manpower. Officers are then deployed to the precise streets or other areas where violent activity is statistically most likely to occur.

The efficiency of the approach is underscored by the fact that crime rates are falling despite heavier caseloads among street-crimes and narcotics detectives.
"We’re in the right place at the right time," said Deputy Chief Robert McGarner. "We’re targeting the right individuals. We’re policing smarter." Added Commander Manning: "We have a lot of technology we didn’t have before."

Meanwhile, a new team focused on gun-violence investigations is also helping to curb violence. Created in 2019, the Crime Gun Intelligence Center provides a range of support in shooting-related investigations, including critical follow-up on leads to identify and arrest shooters.

A new Rapid Response Team that works in conjunction with the BRPD’s Crime Gun Intelligence Center, also new in 2019, responds to all shots-fired alerts. Team members rush to the site of shootings to assist in potential apprehension of shooters and begin crucial evidence collection.

The targeted strategy isn’t just effective in fighting crime. It is also improving community trust that is critical to effective law enforcement. That trust, in turn, encourages more community involvement in the form of valuable tips. "We can target those individuals and leave good people alone," Deputy Chief McGarner said.

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**By the Numbers**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2017</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Crime</td>
<td>13,875</td>
<td>14,187</td>
<td>15,223</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variation:</td>
<td>2.2% decrease from 2018</td>
<td>6.8% decrease from 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violent Crime</td>
<td>2,069</td>
<td>2,069</td>
<td>2,336</td>
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<tr>
<td>Variation:</td>
<td>0% decrease from 2018</td>
<td>11.4% decrease from 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Property Crime</td>
<td>11,806</td>
<td>12,118</td>
<td>12,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation:</td>
<td>2.6% decrease from 2018</td>
<td>6% decrease from 2017</td>
<td></td>
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*For more crime statistics information, go to www.brpd.com.*
The committee’s formation in early 2020 marks the start of historic opportunities for officer training. It will extend beyond leadership to include additional continuing-education training through new elective classes in areas identified as essential to the development of the department’s officers. “We’re saying to our officers, ‘This is your department,’ and we want you to tell us what you need to do your job better,” said Capt. Todd G. Lee, committee chairman and a division commander in the department’s Criminal Investigations Bureau. “This is about providing our officers with tools for their success.”

Leadership committee members vary from rookie officers just a few months into the job to agency veterans like Lee, who joined the force 34 years ago just a few months after his 18th birthday. That’s by design, Capt. Lee noted. “We want officers at every level involved in creating new opportunities and training,” said Capt. Lee, who guides the committee’s work with the help of its assistant chairman, Sgt. Myron Daniels. “We want our officers to see there are no barriers to ascending through the ranks but also give them the training they need to do their best,” Capt. Lee said. The committee’s creation follows changes to the department’s promotional system that gives the chief new discretion in elevating ambitious officers to leadership positions. In the past, promotions to open supervisory posts were based almost entirely on years of service.

By comparison, the revamped process permits the chief to consider factors like specific skills, abilities and assignment history along with individual commendations and achievement while still taking factors such as civil-service exams and seniority into account. National experts in best practices will help the committee develop the basic leadership curriculum for the department’s sergeant, lieutenant, captain and deputy chief ranks. A subcommittee will examine leadership-training needs according to these ranks to optimize its relevance. “This will lay out clearly how to achieve success,” Capt. Lee said. Over time, the committee will develop specialized continuing-education classes in the many disciplines and investigation types throughout the department to include specific supervisory functions. Feedback from officers will determine what new classes to offer, Capt. Lee said. “Our officers are in the best position to tell us what the most effective training should be,” he added. “The end result is to put our officers and supervisors in the position for success, creating the best-trained force for the community.”

Detective Amanda White repaired tanks for the Army National Guard and studied Japanese, history and political science at Ole Miss before joining the Baton Rouge Police Department. Raised in a small town in Oklahoma, a teen-aged White dreamed of joining the Army’s JAG corps after years of watching the hit show of the same name. Her interest later settled on protecting children and the elderly against violence and sexual crimes, work that is the focus of her position as a special victim’s unit detective. She is as passionate about protecting victims as uncovering the truth.

“This work is also about making sure people aren’t falsely acccused,” White said. “You have to look at (every case) as an objective person.” White, 32, joined the force in Baton Rouge after working the night shift as a patrol officer in West Feliciana Parish. She spent three years with the First District in the city’s Plank Road corridor before becoming a detective last year. She loved the streets and bonded with her fellow patrol officers but also finds her current work deeply satisfying. “Being a detective is my dream, and I’m actually getting to accomplish that,” White said.

The gritty nature of her work contrasts with a gentle, easy-going nature. White loves glitter nail polish, brightly colored clothes and video games like Borderlands. She enjoys the shooting range and the shopping mall. She pampers her two big dogs—a German shepherd named Foxtrot and a pit bull/Great Pyrenees mix called Marshmallow. She runs and works out with her twin sister in training for competitions like Tough Mudder obstacle-course races. A member of the force’s new leadership committee, White wants women and girls who might be thinking about a career in law enforcement to know the department is wide open to them.

“There’s this idea that it’s only a man’s world, but that’s not true,” White said. “Being female has never held me back. There is nothing to be afraid of if this is what you want to do.”

“Being a detective is my dream, and I’m actually getting to accomplish that,”

-Det. Amanda White

3
Born to Be an Officer

Interests: Cutting grass, family time.
Officer Jermaine Javius began his journey to becoming a police officer with playful banter at a Juneteenth celebration. While volunteering at the local festival, he exchanged friendly jokes with officers at a nearby booth. Javius, 29, is a graduate of McKinley High School, where he participated in football, baseball and wrestling and aspired to become a professional athlete.

After graduation, he worked in various forms of construction, from industrial to residential. Law enforcement caught his attention after the festival. He began speaking with local officers about their work. After a few years, he knew it was a good fit. Javius signed on for the Academy, but an early interview indicated he wasn’t yet ready to begin training for the force. He set the reset button and enrolled the following year, more determined than ever—and went on to become president of the Baton Rouge Police Department’s 85th Academy class.

Now a patrol officer for the department’s First District, Javius can’t decide what he likes best about his work. “I can honestly say I love it all. Helping people is the best thing. A lot of what we do is just talking to people. People look to us for answers, but sometimes it is just talking and listening that really help.” So, his voice and his smile are important tools in his work. As a member of the department’s new leadership committee, Javius works alongside veteran officers to create a better system for officer advancement.

The effort involves adapting to a changing community and looking for new ways to serve people, he said. Ultimately, the work is good for both the public and the officers on the force, he said. Javius enjoys landscaping in the summer heat and refinishing wood floors with his father—seeing the finished result is the best part, he said. He is a self-taught drummer who plays in a gospel band at Shiloh Baptist Church and enjoys spending time with family.

“A can honestly say I love it all. Helping people is the best thing. A lot of what we do is just talking to people.”
-Ofc. Jermaine Javius

A Moment of Clarity

Interests: Fishing, cigars, bocce
Rookie officer Simon Newsome can tell you exactly when he knew he wanted to be a police officer. The Virginia native was working tech support at a call center on the day in question. Newsome had worked in door-to-door sales, food service and as an Uber driver since high school graduation. He realized his tech-support job was a good position, yet he felt frustrated behind a desk. He longed for a job that was meaningful to him.

A live-action police show flickered on a television on the call-center wall as he lifted his gaze to the screen on that fateful afternoon years ago. A bolt of clarity hit him out of the blue.

“I looked up at the TV and thought, ‘I want to do that,’” said Newsome, now 27. He began preparing for the Baton Rouge Police Department academy shortly thereafter, joined the program in early 2019 and graduated first in his class last year. He is now a patrol officer in the department’s First District—and loving his job.

“There is no other job in the world like this,” Newsome said. Newsome is eager to learn—and quick to point out that experienced officers have much value to offer him. So he was humbled to be invited to join the leadership committee that will shape training and promotion opportunities for veteran and rookie officers alike. “This is an opportunity to have a say in a department where hopefully I’ll be working for 30 years,” Newsome said. “It’s an honor.”

He is humbled by another aspect of his work: building trust between the community and the force. He understands the process is both essential and incremental. “We make changes on an individual level,” he said. “You look for opportunities to do that every day by helping a victim, making a little kid smile or helping someone feel safe. It has to be person to person, one moment at a time.”

The sixth of nine children and the son of a police detective, Newsome connected to Baton Rouge during a visit to two brothers here. Weeks later, he loaded up his blue Dodge Intrepid and drove 18 hours from Virginia to Baton Rouge.

Married since 2017, he is the father of a 1-year-old boy, Simon Joshua. Another baby is on the way. Newsome enjoys cigars, video games and bocce ball with his brothers. He hikes, explores and fishes with his wife. He’s also a master chili cook. “It’s the gumbo of Virginia, and it’s delicious,” he said.
Deputy Chief Jonathan Dunnam,
Administration

I never really thought I’d be a police officer growing up. Back in 1988, I was working as a lifeguard, which was a seasonal job I had while attending LSU. I needed a job after the summer was over and I was approached by a family friend who was a police officer. He asked if I’d be interested in becoming a police cadet to help answer phones in the Crime Stoppers office at night, take in tips and pass them along to the detectives. I agreed and was hired in 1989 at the young age of 19 years old.

I really enjoyed my interaction with concerned citizens and my involvement in passing tips on to investigators. After passing on tips, the detectives informed me if the tips panned out and I relayed that information back to the concerned citizens. Hearing their thankfulness and feeling a sense that I was helping people made me fall in love with the job.

When I turned 21, I had to decide whether to go through the police academy and become a regular police officer or quit my cadet position. I chose to continue my career as a regular police officer by attending the 54th academy (with Tweety and Mac) and I wouldn’t change a thing. I’ve served Baton Rouge for more than 31 years now.

Deputy Chief Robert McGarner,
Field Operations

Serving...It’s a calling for me! From the US Army to the Baton Rouge City Police! It’s about the people in the Community period! You have to have it in your heart to do this job. If you don’t, the community will suffer because you will not serve them the right way, making you a part of the problem. I want to be a part of the solution, so I serve for the people. I’ve been serving Baton Rouge for 31 years.

Deputy Chief Herbert Anny,
Operational Services

I serve to stand in the gap for those who are unable to do so for themselves. I’ve been with BRPD 30 years.
A new grassroots group of determined women focuses on bringing healing to grieving families and hurting communities to combat gun violence in Baton Rouge. The organization is composed of family and community members who have been impacted by gun violence. The mission and vision of C.H.A.N.G.E. includes identifying resources for families impacted by gun violence, such as grief support, assistance with funeral costs and guidance during homicide investigations. It is also helping the BR Police Department support mothers facing the loss of a child in collaboration with its victims’ assistance coordinator.

C.H.A.N.G.E. stands for Community Healing and Nurturing Growth through Edification, but the year-old group goes by the acronym because C.H.A.N.G.E. is what it wants. Door-to-door outreach is fundamental to its efforts. Last year, members began canvassing neighborhoods, introducing themselves and seeking residents’ insights on how to protect their children and neighbors from gun violence. In addition, C.H.A.N.G.E. hosted five community listening sessions in five communities across five days. This segment was presented as “Chopping it up for C.H.A.N.G.E.” Neighborhood outreach is a chance to make connections and encourage residents to reach out to someone they trust if they have a crime tip or are worried about potential violence on their streets or in their lives. What residents say they want—whether it’s more after-school programs or job opportunities for teens—will form the basis of an action plan and strategy to achieve those aims over time.

Fostering trust between families and law enforcement is another objective, as is developing a manual of community resources from youth programs to grief counseling. C.H.A.N.G.E. led this year’s NAACP MLK March to bring awareness to the importance of eliminating gun violence. A federal Collective Healing grant is providing early support for C.H.A.N.G.E. in the form of technical assistance and national networking. Part of this effort has been led by national technical support partners EJUSA and local planning and consulting partner A.G.I.L.E. Planning Solutions Inc. EJ USA initiated connections with representatives of similar national grassroots organizations such as Mothers-In-Charge, headquartered in Philadelphia. Representatives of the organization’s chapter in Oakland, California, and other cities traveled to Baton Rouge last year to share insight as C.H.A.N.G.E. develops its local footing.

As part of C.H.A.N.G.E.’s long-term strategy, it is interested in developing a crisis-response team in partnership with the Baton Rouge Police Department to support families in the hours after a loved one is killed or injured by gunfire. C.H.A.N.G.E. is being pursued for partnership with Homeland Security’s Project Safe Neighborhood grant. The partnership focuses on educating young people about gun safety and the impact of gun violence. C.H.A.N.G.E.’s Liz Robinson conveys the organization’s hope that communities will take back control of their communities. “If you see something, say something,” Robinson said. The department recognizes the value of C.H.A.N.G.E.’s work. Corporal Sherri Harris is its victims’ services coordinator and serves as a liaison between detectives working multiple cases and grieving families with questions about their cases. A former homicide detective, Cpl. Harris hands out her cell phone number and encourages victims’ family members to call as often as they want for investigation updates. Talking with grieving mothers and helping them understand how the investigative process works is a big part of her job.

“I don’t have set hours,” Cpl. Harris said. Harris understands the healing power that one grieving mother can offer another.

“We want people to understand that we’re serious about change, and that if you’re in Baton Rouge then you are part of the community.”

-Cpl. Sherri Harris

She reaches out to C.H.A.N.G.E.’s Robinson to provide that comfort to mothers reeling from loss. Robinson understands their grief. Her 29-year-old son, Louis Robinson Jr., a veteran, father and rapper, was shot to death on Cadillac Street in 2018. Robinson is comfortable calling mothers she has never met to share her experience with them. “Her strength is amazing,” Cpl. Harris said. The department has recognized that strength in additional ways, looking to the charismatic mother of five to share her message in a recent anti-violence public service announcement. Bonita Kleinpeter and Andrea Hayes are also important members of C.H.A.N.G.E.’s team. Hayes, too, has been directly affected by gun violence: Her son has been shot twice, but survived the shootings. Much of C.H.A.N.G.E.’s work is about renewing hope and encouraging people to look out for one another, said Sateria Tate-Alexander, A.G.I.L.E. founder and a project manager who is guiding the organization’s development. “A lot of this comes back to the idea that it takes a village,” Tate-Alexander said. “We want people to understand that we’re serious about change, and that if you’re in Baton Rouge then you are part of the community.”

Sateria Tate-Alexander, Cpl. Sherri Harris, Elizabeth Robinson
Proactive crime-fighting is a reality in Baton Rouge with the initial opening of the East Baton Rouge Real-Time Crime Center (RTCC) in mid-March. RTCC technology will improve officer safety, support precision crime-reduction strategies and create historic opportunities for community engagement in public-safety initiatives. Collaboration with other law enforcement agencies, community partnerships and strategic grant funding were essential in acquiring RTCC data and tools to prevent and respond to crime.

**KEY AREAS OF FOCUS INCLUDE:**

- **Improved situational awareness:** Information concerning warrants, previous arrests and past calls for service will be relayed to squad-car laptops and officer phones as patrol units respond to incidents.

- **Violence-reduction:** Data-driven analytics will identify sites and suspects at highest risk for violent crime to shape precision crime-reduction initiatives.

- **Community engagement:** Social-media advisories will alert the community to developments from traffic snarls to narcotic seizures.

- **Operational efficiency:** Data from across the department will identify the most effective ways to use manpower and other resources.

A visit to the RTCC at department headquarters on Airline Highway feels like a visit to the future. The RTCC is deploying groundbreaking technologies from companies like General Informatics and Motorola. These technologies integrate existing platforms and silos of data into a single, true real-time, visible representation of the current operating picture. Live data and video feeds light up the oversized video screens that line the RTCC’s walls. Flashing, colored maps show the position of squad cars, police radios, gunfire and traffic accidents. Gunfire sensors generate computerized dispatches that immediately send detectives and patrol officers to shooting sites to apprehend suspects, aid gunshot victims or begin on-scene investigations.

Human expertise is at work here, too. An incident-command officer uses data from multiple sources to guide officer response in a newly created post for RTCC operations. Banks of desktop monitors line the multi-level platform that gives the incident commander a sweeping view of technology tracking what is happening across Baton Rouge.

The technology includes tools in use at only a handful of U.S. police agencies. The ability to track officers by their portable radios is a striking example of safety advances made possible by the RTCC’s breakthrough technology. While standard tools show the location of GPS-equipped squad cars, they lose sight of officers who exit their vehicles for foot pursuits or other reasons. By comparison, RTCC’s radio-tracking tool gives supervisors and other responding officers the precise location of officers already on the scene. Other RTCC tools provide new efficiency to police investigations. For example, artificial-intelligence systems enable detectives to quickly search recorded video for a specific object—say, a white truck—instead of spending hours looking at footage. The technology in seconds retrieves time-stamped images of what the detective is looking for. A search for white trucks compiles images of any and all white trucks while ignoring objects that do not match that description.

Another tool generates alerts when it senses activity that it recognizes as unusual, say a person walking in a roadway or a vehicle driving the wrong way on a street. “It brings our attention to something out of the ordinary that may require a closer look,” explained Sgt. Jim Verlander.

A highly anticipated public-private camera-share program is also under development and expected to be in place by year’s end, when the RTCC will function at about 75 percent capacity, Sgt. Verlander said.
Other tools in the works include a phone-based app that teachers, students, employees and parents can use to alert the department of potential violence at local public schools. Law enforcement and community partners were essential to the success of grant applications for crime-reduction initiatives that provided the RTCC with new data and new technology, said Sgt. Neal Noel.

State-of-the-art risk-modeling technology illustrates the point. A $700,000 Strategic Policing Grant supported development and testing of the tool in 2019. The technology uses analytics to map the risk of violent-crime in 500-by-500-foot geographic grids across Baton Rouge. Building the tool involved customizing technology developed at Rutgers University with local crime data and feedback from community surveys on perceived crime risk at specific sites. Grant funding helped identify the highest-risk grids in Baton Rouge and then cover the cost of overtime pay to assign more officers to those locations. “The community has a role in this,” Sgt. Noel said. Grant funding was critical to development of other RTCC tools, including community crime-reduction initiatives.

A $1 million Community-Based Crime Reduction grant will offer community leaders in areas with disproportionate rates of violence a new opportunity to help reduce crime. Community leaders will examine detailed crime data in collaboration with law-enforcement and government officials to devise new crime-prevention strategies for their neighborhoods. RTCC analytics will play an ongoing role in work done by the multi-agency Community-Based Crime Reduction Advisory Council once it is formed. “This is building community engagement,” Sgt. Noel said. “The community will be playing a role in reducing violent crime.” The facility will create additional opportunities for multi-agency partnerships, too, he noted. “The level of regional law-enforcement partnership we have is highly unusual and this will bring more of that,” Sgt. Noel said. “This is a regional tool.”

TELEPHONE REPORTING UNIT

A new network of telephone kiosks at precincts across Baton Rouge gives residents an additional option for reporting minor incidents. The Baton Rouge Police Department’s new Telephone Reporting Unit also frees up the equivalent of 45 officers per week for street patrols. “This puts more officers in the field where they are most needed,” said Sgt. Jim Verlander. “This means more boots on the ground.”

In operation since late 2019 and open 24 hours per day Monday through Friday, the kiosks connect citizens to officers at a centralized call-in site at the department’s Airline Highway headquarters. Live two-way video permits users to see and speak directly to an officer who takes their information. The officer can send out an officer from the local district to speak to citizens face-to-face or take evidence from them if needed. In the past, officers were assigned to desks inside each district to handle walk-in reports about non-emergencies.

The kiosk-based approach moves the equivalent of nine officers per day from behind those desks and into the field for patrol and other duties, Sgt. Verlander noted. The new unit’s staffing is efficient in an additional way. The system may be expanded in time to operate on weekends, meaning still more efficiencies. Sgt. Verlander added that residents can still call from home or elsewhere to report minor incidents, if they prefer. “This is one more way to reach an officer,” he said. To help our officers practice social distancing for the pandemic, the Telephone Reporting Unit and the kiosks proved to be essential tools in minimizing contact between officers and citizens. The deployment of this technology is just another example of how law enforcement utilizes innovation to serve our citizens more efficiently and safely. Citizens had the option to phone in their complaints or scan a QR code or click a link to have video conference with a police officer instead of an officer being dispatched.
The Baton Rouge Police Department formalized its commitment to the well-being of its force in 2019 in establishing an officer-wellness division to support officers and their families. “This is about taking care of those who take care of the community,” said Sgt. Rendy Richard, the new division’s director. “Our goal is to provide resources to officers and their families so they can thrive.”

Expanded wellness resources include more trained peer support members. The number of certified peer-support members rose from 12 to 31 last year. The department is also using its volunteer Peer Support Team in ways that align with best practices.

A new Critical Incident Peer Support Team (CIPS) sends assigned teams to the scene or the hospital after traumatic events like an officer-involved shooting. Members of the team help officers understand what they might experience in the days, weeks or months after a traumatic incident, including difficulty concentrating, trouble sleeping or other symptoms that can be produced by trauma.

“They help officers understand there is additional help if they need it and will follow up with officers and their families for several weeks,” Sgt. Richard said. The Baton Rouge force is one of five U.S. agencies to receive a Collective Healing grant from the International Association of Chiefs of Police for new wellness efforts. Like the groundbreaking Collective Healing initiative, the department’s efforts align with growing recognition of job-related stresses that put officers at elevated risk for mental and physical health impacts.

A national spike in law-enforcement suicides has created new urgency surrounding the issue. More U.S. officers die by suicide than are killed in the line of duty, according to a 2018 Ruderman Family Foundation study. Officer suicides rose by 24 percent in 2019, the third straight year of increases, according to BLUE H.E.L.P., a national non-profit that works to reduce the stigma of mental-health issues among officers.

In Baton Rouge, some officers still struggle from 2016’s community trauma—the shooting of Alton Sterling, the deadly assault on officers, street protests and historic flooding that kept some officers and their families out of damaged homes as long as two years. The suicide of one officer and the catastrophic injury of another during a traffic stop are among the incidents experienced by members of the force in recent years. Sgt. Richard noted that trauma linked to such events can cause brain injuries that can be healed with the right resources. “You can recover from trauma,” she said.

The department’s expanded wellness resources support physical well-being, too. A new partnership with Baton Rouge General Hospital expedites officers’ access to medical appointments and emergency treatment. It includes a telephone number for officers to use to reach nurses for help.

More events like Laser-Tag outings for officers and their children or gatherings for officers and their spouses are likewise designed to give families new opportunities to blow off steam and bond over fun. There is a community benefit to officer wellness, too. Research shows officers at agencies with wellness programs have more positive interactions with the communities they serve. “Healthier officers can better serve the community,” Sgt. Richard said.
A focus on best recruiting practices enabled the Baton Rouge Police Department to realize two milestone achievements: the end of a federal consent decree and unparalleled diversity among its newest class of recruits. The achievements are more striking in view of a continuing challenge: The salaries of Baton Rouge officers lag those at peer agencies by 30 percent. Chief Murphy Paul has pledged to close the gap and continues work to identify and implement operational efficiencies to help secure a pay raise.

It would be difficult to overstate the 2019 end of the consent decree. It had been in place since 1980 after federal officials determined hiring and promotional practices, as in cities across Louisiana, discriminated against black and female applicants in violation of U.S. law. At the time, 10 percent of the department’s officers were black. By 2019, black officers represented about 34 percent of the force, while women accounted for 9 percent. The make-up of the department’s 86th Basic Training Academy class underscores growing success in building a diverse force.

The class includes seven women—five black and two Hispanic women—among those who began the department’s Basic Training Academy on June 1, 2020, noted Cpl. Darren Ahmed, director of recruiting. Of the 22 men in the academy, eight are black, eight are white, four are Hispanic, one is Asian and one is classified as other.

The age range of the class is 22 to 47, with an average class age of 28. Rising diversity among recruits is in step with a community that is also more diverse. “It builds trust and reflects where we’re going,” Cpl. Ahmed said.

Meanwhile, identifying new efficiencies to help fund an officer pay raise continues as a top priority for Chief Paul. To that end, the department has implemented some operational changes identified by consultants as part of an ongoing efficiency study that began in mid-2019. Cpl. Ahmed noted that the focus on best practices extends to the much-needed pay raise, which will boost the department’s ability to attract the best-qualified recruits.

“We need that pay raise,” Cpl. Ahmed said. “It is essential to recruiting.” Cpl. Ahmed not only recruits police officers, but he is responsible for the recruitment of candidates to fill non-sworn positions within the police department as well, such as Police Communications Officer, Criminal Information Specialist, and Fingerprint Technician.

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There is nothing sweeter to her than the words, thank you. “That’s my joy, knowing I helped somebody,” — Ramona Palmer

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Employee Spotlight—Quiet hero of the force

Cpl. Darren Ahmed and Ramona Palmer

For 26 years, Dispatcher Ramona Palmer has answered calls for help from across the city. The information she enters at her keyboard is the first step in a process of potentially life-changing consequence for callers and officers alike. Palmer takes every call to heart.

“I’m thinking about officer safety,” Palmer said. She begins her shifts with a prayer of safety for officers and serenity for herself. She never forgets why she does what she does. “Our purpose is to protect lives, prevent crime and protect the citizens of Baton Rouge,” Palmer said. A communications supervisor, Palmer recognizes some officers by name and voice even though she has never met them face to face. There is nothing sweeter to her than the words, Thank you. “That’s my joy, knowing I helped somebody,” Palmer said.

Palmer credits military training—22 years in the Army Reserve and five on active duty—for her ability to stay calm during urgent calls. There are opportunities for communications officers at the department, Palmer notes. The first step is to take a civil-service exam, but applicants also need good listening and typing skills. Palmer’s work is difficult but after 26 years she has no regrets. “I love my job,” she said.
Nalon Soileau, a 16-year-old high school junior, was curious what police work was really like. So was senior Mike Wicker, 18, who heads to Southern University to play football and study criminal justice this fall. Both teens gained in-depth understanding of the challenges officers face as part of the Baton Rouge Police Department’s new Explorers program for teens ages 14 to 18.

The program that re-launched in 2019 after a decades-long hiatus is hands-on and real world. Explorers Wicker and Soileau learned to shoot a rifle as part of the firearm-safety unit. They became certified in CPR. They learned how to take fingerprints and preserve crime scenes. They learned about the bomb squad and the dive team. They rode along with EMS teams to crime scenes to watch officers begin investigations into shootings and other major incidents. They learned the rationale behind every element of traffic-stop protocol. They also helped out at a homeless shelter and met people they never would have met otherwise, including new friends from across the city. Soileau and Wicker, both sergeants since their recent graduation, will shape the curriculum for a new class of Explorers this year.

The program is part of a growing focus on community policing. The goal is building trust hurt by the traumas of 2016: the Alton Sterling shooting, ambush on our officers, the protests and deadly flooding. The department has held more than 650 community events since 2018. Last year’s outreach included car shows, pastor-led prayer walks, holiday toy drives, Dr. Seuss readings at local schools and seminars on parenting and home safety. The department intends to offer free summer camps, in 2020, for kids 7 to 14 for the third year through a Recast grant from the city, if conditions allow. The common thread in all of this? Showing people that officers care about them. “You police differently when you know a neighborhood,” Sgt. Johnson said. “We want to show we’re a part of the community and care about people. We also want to give people a chance to get to know us and hopefully care about us, too.”

“Those kids are shedding light on what we do and bridging the gap with the community,” -Sgt. Johnson

Explorers like Wicker and Soileau are also building trust through their improved understanding of the force, he added. “These kids are shedding light on what we do and bridging the gap with the community,” Sgt. Johnson said. Soileau echoed that perspective. “The subject of why police do what they do comes up naturally in conversation more often than you’d think,” she said. Wicker has shared new insights with friends who expressed distrust in officers. “I tell them officers are here to help us,” he said. “We have the chance to heal divisions.” Both teens made other meaningful connections through the 8-month program that typically meets every other weekend. “I saw things in this community that I never would have seen otherwise,” Soileau said. Wicker enjoyed the program so much he will continue in the department’s new Cadet program, still under development. He is thinking about going to law school one day and believes what he learned as an Explorer will help him be a better attorney. For her part, Soileau is considering a career in medicine or law enforcement. Wicker said he would like other teens to know this about the Explorers program. “I would never know what I know about Baton Rouge without this experience,” he said. “It’s awesome.”
A new opportunity for listening and learning

Chief Murphy Paul in 2019 established a new line of communication between community leaders and the Baton Rouge Police Department. Chief Paul shares updates on operations and initiatives at meetings of the new Chief’s Advisory Council, whose members represent a cross-section of grassroots groups and local organizations.

“This is part of building a relationship to keep everybody safe, residents and officers alike.”
-Rev. McCullough-Bade

Council members’ ties to neighborhoods across Baton Rouge equip them with insight into resident concerns and the ability to get out information on police initiatives. But council members don’t just listen. The quarterly meetings are also an opportunity to provide the chief with feedback to shape community initiatives.

“The chief is looking for our input,” said A.V. Mitchell, a community-engagement specialist for MetroMorphosis, a non-profit focused on transforming urban neighborhoods from within. “It’s a way to offer him ideas to better serve the communities in Baton Rouge,” Mitchell said.

A number of police agencies around the U.S. have established advisory councils since the 2015 Presidential Task Force in 21st Century Policing identified them as a best practice.

At a recent meeting, council members suggested ways to make the BRPD Cadet program now under development more appealing to young people, Mitchell noted.

He has suggested ways to communicate issues of importance to the community, such as the factors that determine police response times to calls for service.

Rev. Robin McCullough-Bade is the Executive Director of the Interfaith Federation of Greater Baton Rouge, work that takes her to diverse faith communities and neighborhoods throughout the city. She sees her role on the council as two-fold:

Helping to convey the concerns of the community’s diverse population and also sharing new police policies with residents. “It works both ways,” Rev. McCullough-Bade said. “This is part of building a relationship to keep everybody safe, residents and officers alike.”
In the past three years, the Baton Rouge Police Department has implemented policy changes, engaged community members to listen, and instituted new technology to support Police Reform. However, we know there is more work to do, but would like to highlight some of what has been done thus far:

- Body Camera Program
- De-Escalation Training
- Procedural Justice Training
- Early Intervention System
- Officers must give a verbal warning
- Officers cannot use choke-holds
- Police cannot shoot at moving vehicles
- Duty to Intervene
- Comprehensive Reporting
- Use of force Continuum
- Online Complaint Process
- Chief's Advisory Council

*Keep talking Baton Rouge, because we will never stop listening.*
Cpl. Maglone was shot alongside Lt. Hutto, Jr. on Sunday, April 26, 2020, while attempting to locate a murder suspect. Lt. Hutto was fatally wounded. Cpl. Maglone was admitted to a local hospital and later sent home to continue recovery. The men and women of the Baton Rouge Police Department serve the Capital City with diligence and commitment. Their sacrifice is a testament to the oath they have taken. We want to take this opportunity to thank the Baton Rouge community for the thoughts, prayers, and fundraisers given to support these officers and their families. We ask you to keep these families and B.R.P.D. in your prayers as we continue to heal.

"A hero is an ordinary person facing extraordinary circumstances and acting with courage, honor, and self-sacrifice."

--Author unknown
Remembering Our Fallen Officers

Chief J. B. Hare
Officer Salvatore J. Merino
Chief of Detectives Frank E. Schoonmaker
Lieutenant George W. Bannister
Sergeant Joseph Sanchez
Officer J. D. Blackwell
Officer Thomas R. Fancher
Officer Dennis R. Heap
Officer Karl F. Bourgoyne
Officer Linda A. Lawrence
Lieutenant Carl Robert Dabadie
Officer Charles David Stegall
Sergeant Warren Joseph Broussard
Corporal Betty Dunn Smothers
Lieutenant Vickie Salassi Wax
Detective Terry Lee Melancon, Jr.
Corporal Christopher Michael Metternich
Officer Mark A. Beck
Corporal Montrell Lyle Jackson
Officer Matthew Lane Gerald
Corporal Bryan Garrett Thompson
Corporal Shane Michael Totty
Lieutenant Glenn Dale Hutto, Jr.
K-9 Philos