

CITY BEAT

City of Valdosta

MARCH - APRIL 2021



STORIES COMPOSED BY CITY OF VALDOSTA PUBLIC
INFORMATION OFFICE

IN THIS ISSUE



04-10

Behind the Badge



11-13

Road Repairs



14-16

Mayor's Paddle



17-19

Azalea Sprinter Train



20-23

**Neighborhood Action
Associations**



24-26

VPD 2020 Crime Stats

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- Ashlynn Johnson Valdosta
City PIO

BEHIND THE BADGE



*Get to know
the Men and
Women
Serving in
our Public
Safety
Departments*

Commander Bernard Robinson

"All you need, is to do the right thing, treat people how you want to be treated, and you will love this job."



Though most emergencies are difficult to plan for, there is comfort in knowing that help is available through those that work in Public Safety. Public Safety involves protecting the public from crimes, disasters, and other potential dangers or threats in their simplest form. It is comprised of departments such as Fire Services, Law Enforcement, EMS, and many more. Behind the Badge aims to showcase the courageous men and women who serve in our Public Safety fields for the City of Valdosta.

In each issue of City Beat, we will take an in-depth look at members from Valdosta's Police and Fire Departments to get to know the people behind the uniforms better.

When Commander Bernard Robinson started with the Valdosta Police Department, he had no idea it would result in a career that would last 34 years. As a former automobile factory worker, Robinson had played around with the idea of joining the force one day but was not sold on it until his sister recommended that he apply. She had joined the department's records division and immediately knew that he would be a good fit. Initially, Robinson started as a Patrol Officer.

Still, he was able to work his way up quickly and held various positions such as Detective, Sergeant, Lieutenant, and of course, Commander, to name a few.

Though 34 years seems like a long time, Commander Robinson never once considered leaving and enjoys that his job has allowed him to meet and interact with people within the community. "Meeting people has been my favorite part of working with the department. I tell the officers that each day is different. You meet someone new every day. I have met well over thousands of people throughout my career, and it has just been an enjoyable job," said the Commander.

In addition to meeting new people, Robinson's chosen profession has allowed him to impact the community he has grown up in positively. "I didn't realize how important being from this community was until I was out on the streets doing calls. When people are already familiar with you and trust you, it goes a long way. There were times when I was out in the community with people who were a little hostile, and other citizens would step in to vouch for me," said Robinson.



Building trust in the community has helped the Commander during his time in law enforcement. It is essential as it plays into the advice he gives all new officers, treating others how you want to be treated. He emphasizes the importance of treating everyone he comes into contact with courteously and respectfully.

He states that as an officer, people grant him the authority to enforce the law. If citizens do not trust and respect the officers or the department, it becomes difficult to do a good job. This is especially critical considering how the community can be a valuable resource in solving a case.

When someone calls and I tell them I will look into the issue, they trust me. If they don't trust us, we can't do our jobs. The community helps us solve so many crimes, we are not there to see it for ourselves, and we get our information from witnesses. If we are not honest with them, they will not be honest with us," he said.

Commander Robinson thinks that VPD is excellent at treating people the right way and says that their participation in the CALEA accreditation process has played a significant part. This accreditation process examines all aspects of the department's policies and procedures, management practices, daily operations, and support services.

It is an entirely voluntary process to maintain international accreditation. The department has been internationally accredited since 1999 and complies with 484 standards for professionalism and service delivery in Law Enforcement.

Outside of work, another valuable piece of advice Robinson offers is to make sure you have a strong foundation at home. "From my perspective, the mentality it takes to be successful in the department is to have a clear conscience, do the right thing. You have to have a strong foundation at home. If you don't have that support, things will crumble because what you bring from home carries into your job. There is just no way to cut it off. Whether you are single or married," he said.



"To be successful in the department is to have a clear conscience, do the right thing."

Luckily for Robinson, he has had the support of his wife throughout his entire career. Even being astounded at times by her unwavering support, as she has pushed him to do the best that he could from the start. Commander Robinson and his wife married four months after becoming an officer, which can be seen as the most challenging time for any spouse with all the uncertainty of what the position may entail.

If the abundance of support received from his family wasn't enough to make him proud, his son decided to follow in his footsteps sure did the job. Wesley Robinson has worked as a Patrol Officer for the Valdosta Police Department for a little over a year. Commander Robinson was flattered by this decision because it meant that he could show his son how Law Enforcement was a promising career.



As Commander Robinson prepares to retire this April, he hopes to leave his fellow officers with this last bit of advice, "Somedays are not as good as others. Some people will put you down, but you know who you are, so don't let people tell you about being something you are not. Just keep your head up. You will have support. A lot of us here are like family, and you will feel that family support. All you need is to do the right thing treat people how you want to be treated, and you will love this job," said Robinson.

Sergeant Justin Smith



Family tradition seems to be an ongoing theme in the Public Safety field/ Justin Smith, Sergeant for the Valdosta Fire Department, comes from a long line of Public Safety officials. Sergeant Smith originally planned to work as a football coach after graduating from high school, but a sports injury, unfortunately, ended this goal. His father implanted the idea of becoming a Firefighter into his head after joining the Public Safety field. Smith's father served in Law Enforcement for 20 years and eventually switched to the Emergency Management field.

Sergeant Smith soon enrolled in fire-safety courses at Valdosta Tech and instantly fell in love with being a firefighter. Taking classes, Sergeant Smith was still unaware of how he would turn his education into a career.

As luck would have it, a rumor began to spread that Valdosta Fire Department was looking to recruit new members from Smith's class. With a gentle nudge from his instructor, Smith applied and was one of eight that were hired onto VFD. Sixteen years later and four students from the original class remain, including Smith. Since joining, Smith has had several family members enter into Public Safety positions, including his younger brother, who is currently serving as the Brooks County Fire Chief.

SMITH HAS BEEN WITH VFD FOR SIXTEEN YEARS.

FIRE STATION NO.6



"We all work extremely well together at VFD. When we show up for work or to a call, it is like we are all family."

As a Sergeant, Smith's responsibilities include operating and driving the fire truck when responding to calls and a daily inspection of the truck and equipment on board to verify that everything is operable. He is also tasked with being crew leader whenever his Lieutenant is out. This, of course, is in addition to numerous hours spent training and recertifying to stay up to date on all their skills. Additionally, the department does a significant amount of preplanning work. This entails working with local businesses to map out a strategy if a fire should occur after hours and fire hydrant inspections. All fire hydrants within city limits are checked often to ensure that they are visible and working.

Though demanding, he enjoys every part of his job but especially likes that he never knows what each day will look like. "To me, my favorite part of the job is that it is not a routine job. It is not coming to work, clocking in, and doing the same thing every day. Since I started at 19, you never know what to expect. Each day is different. Each call is different," said the Sergeant. As a bonus, Smith genuinely enjoys helping others. He knows that as a Firefighter, he often encounters people during one of the most challenging times in their lives, so helping in any way he can, whether it be putting out a fire or saving a cat from a tree, brings him contentment.

Members of the department practice essential skills at the Valdosta Fire Department Training Center to ensure that they can respond to emergencies quickly and efficiently.



Of course, every achievement, big or small, is a group effort and according to Smith, having a crew that functions and the Valdosta Fire Department help make the workload feel much more effortless. He describes their intricacy as a football team stating, "Fire Services is like a football team. We come from all walks of life, religions, backgrounds, cultures, and political views and come together for one common purpose. We all work extremely well together at VFD. When we show up for work or to a call, it is like we are all family."

Problem-solving and knowing that he has made a difference in his community is more than enough satisfaction for Sergeant Smith. He says that occasionally the Fire Chief will receive letters from citizens thanking them for their work, but thanks are unnecessary. "I could go every day for the rest of my career without hearing a thank you, and it would be ok. That is just what we do. It is my job. The job is thanks enough," said Smith.

After sixteen years with the department, Smith offers advice to anyone considering a career in Fire Services, which is to take the good with the bad. The job is very demanding and will result in lost time with family and even missed holidays. Still, the reward of making an impact in people's lives significantly outweighs any of the negatives. "To me, it is an amazing job. I wouldn't trade it for any amount of money," said Smith.

Commander Robinson and Sergeant Smith's service has not gone unnoticed. The city would like to acknowledge and thank all the men and women who sacrifice their time to keep our community safe.



Road Repairs

A photograph of a street intersection. In the foreground, a large, full-canopied pine tree stands on the left side of the road. To its right, a traffic light pole extends over the intersection, displaying a green light. Further right, another traffic light pole shows a red light. A green street sign for 'LEE ST.' is visible on the right pole, and a green sign for 'PARK AVE.' is on the left. Several vehicles, including a white SUV, a red car, and a white truck, are visible on the road. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

City Engineer Kevin Tolliver gives insight as to which repairs take president over others



In 2019 Valdosta City Council adding funding in the budget for the Engineering Department, allowing them to contract with a third-party company named Infrastructure Management Services (IMS). IMS provides the previously mentioned motorized vehicle and technician. The approved request also granted the Engineering Department the ability to perform dyna-flect mobilization, deflection testing, mapping, and any additional on-site items as needed.

Kevin Tolliver, the city's Development Review Engineer, says that this process comes with a bonus. In addition to determining the overall road health, it can detect leaks in utility lines under the roadways.

More than six million car accidents occur annually in the United States. Though various causes can lead to a crash, it is vital to take a proactive approach to minimize these occurrences, such as assuring that our roadways are intact and safe for travel. Driving on a well-paved road is not just a luxury but a necessity. The city of Valdosta owns and maintains 323 miles of streets and has recently adopted a new, more efficient method for determining which road repairs take precedence.

Previously, the city relied on observances made by the Engineering Department, as they are in charge of road maintenance and city leadership to determine the condition of local roads. This process was referred to as "windshield surveys," with the most current one being done in 2017.

In recent years, however, they have switched a process known as a Pavement Management System. This planning tool is used to aid pavement resurfacing decisions by examining the conditions of both the pavement and base underneath. It can detect deterioration caused by traffic or weather and overall pavement quality. This is done by using a motorized vehicle equipped with automatic sensors operated by a specialty technician.

THE LATEST ROAD REPAVING THE CITY HAS COMPLETED WAS AT THE INTERSECTION OF LEE ST. AND PARK AVE.





Kevin Tolliver Development Review Engineer for the city of Valdosta

“We find what we call areas needing base repair where rain or traffic has caused the stone base underneath the pavement to be washed away. We have also found places where utility lines have leaked which can cause the soil and rock to be moved away. It helps the Utility department as well in areas where a leak may have previously gone undetected.” said Tolliver.

Though mending damaged roadways is a priority, research done by Tolliver and his team has shown that it is significantly less expensive to keep a road in good condition than it is to repair a deteriorated one. For this reason, the Pavement Management System places roads in need of preventative maintenance above the reconstruction of those in poor condition.

The city currently has a five-year study in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the Pavement Management System and the company it has chosen to carry out that service. The new system has resulted in 50 roads being repaved in its first year and similar numbers in the following years. Tolliver predicts that if the process continues to run smoothly, most of the streets within city limits will be repaved.

MAYOR'S PADDLE





"My love for these waters has been a lifelong passion. I wanted to show everyone and anyone but especially the Riverkeepers themselves and the counties down in Florida that we are wholly and totally committed to keeping them clean,"

The city of Valdosta is home to some of the most beautiful waterways in South Georgia. These streams, lakes, and rivers provide the city with a plethora of natural resources that significantly increase the quality of life for all. The Withlacoochee River, being the most well-known in the area, is filled with an abundance of trees and serene ambiance, making it a popular visiting site for locals and travelers. For this reason, Valdosta Mayor Scott James Matheson created an event to help highlight and preserve these waters known as the Mayor's Paddle on the River.

The Mayor's Paddle kicked off in February of 2020 and, now in its' second year, has grown in popularity. Attendees gathered at 9 am on Saturday, March 27, near a boat ramp off the Withlacoochee River to paddle the waters and speak to the Mayor about conservation.

Mayor Matheson's inspiration for the event came from his love of Valdosta's waterways and a desire to showcase the city's dedication to preserving them. "My love for these waters has been a lifelong passion. I wanted to show everyone and anyone but especially the Riverkeepers themselves and the counties down in Florida that we are wholly and totally committed to keeping them clean," said the Mayor.

At the first-ever paddle, Mayor Matheson vowed to dedicate his time to assist in cleaning up Valdosta's waterways so that they can be enjoyed for years to come. Since then, the city's Utilities Department has made great efforts to rehab the entire sewer system through projects and investments. Some of the changes made so far include funding for backup power at 35 of the 37 wastewater and lift stations, the rehabilitation of 35 manholes, the implementation of a fats, oils, and grease (FOG) elimination program ordinance, and the addition of a seven and a half million-gallon catch basin installed at the Withlacoochee Waste Water Treatment Plant.

Daryl Muse, Utilities Director for the city of Valdosta, is optimistic about their work but admits there is still more to come. He states, "We are close, we are still not there, but we are making progress. We are trying to work with some citizens to encourage them not to put fats, oils, and grease into the system. We have an active program with billboards up on the interstate and downtown for FOG, and we have folks going to 23,000 residential and commercial connections in the city to talk to their customers about the cleanouts." This is important because about 90 percent of sewer backups result from fats, oils, and grease being disposed of into the system.



So how does this affect the river? If severe enough, sewer backups can cause a sewage spill that can end up in surrounding waterways. The same can be said for overflows at the wastewater treatment plants. If the system experiences an influx of water, it can lead to an overflow, meaning that again more untreated sewer water finds its way into our streams, lakes, and rivers.

This water is untreated and impacts the contamination levels in the river and the entire ecosystem that inhabits it. It is imperative that all wastewater is directed to the wastewater treatment plants to be adequately processed and treated before reentering the waterways.

This is where we see the direct benefit of the initiatives taken by the Utilities Department and the Mayor's Paddle event. The event encourages not only conservationists but everyone to get involved in the conversation about preservation.

However, it is essential to note that the event would not have been possible if not for the city's partnership with Water Shed Coalition Incorporated (WWALS).

"These rivers are an untapped resource that we are utilizing in our community from the standpoint of quality of life."

WWALS is an organization that advocates for protection and stewardship for Withlacoochee, Willacoochee, Alapaha, Little, Santa Fe, and Suwannee Rivers watersheds in South Georgia and North Florida through education awareness, environmental monitoring, and citizen activities.

Though the organization is a non-profit, it does charge its members a small fee. That fee is then used for water quality testing.

Testers travel over 80 river miles on the Withlacoochee and Little River to examine contamination levels and ensure the waters are clean and safe to enjoy.

This year Lowndes County also got involved by co-hosting and co-sponsoring the paddle. Chairman Slaughter shares in this passion for preservation by saying, "I want to say how much appreciation I have for the City of Valdosta and all that they are doing with their wastewater as far as helping our rivers and streams. These rivers are an untapped resource that we are utilizing in our community from the standpoint of quality of life." The Chairman also recalls the many weekends he spent with his family fishing, boating, and swimming on the river, amplifying his desires to preserve it for future generations to come.

Additional participating organizations included The Boys and Girls Club of Valdosta and the Valdosta State student organization VSU CORE. Mayor Matheson hopes to keep this tradition going long after his time in office, but in the meantime, you can catch the Mayor at his annual Paddle on the River.

AZALEA SPRINTER EXCURSION TRAIN





The community of Valdosta served as inspiration when naming the excursion train, as the Azalea has been the city flower for decades.

The Azalea Sprinter is South Georgia's very own excursion train traveling along the historic Georgia and Florida Railroad. Currently, passengers can board the train in Nashville, Georgia, and travel either to Willacoochee, Moody, or Valdosta and back. However, thanks to a series of fortunate coincidences, Mayor Scott James Matheson hopes to partner with the rail carrier and have an additional depot location built in Downtown Valdosta.

The Azalea Sprinter hosted its first official run on Saturday, March 13. As an excursion train, the Azalea Sprinter does not operate at full track speed, allowing its passengers to relax and become immersed in the South Georgia scenery. The train is operated by CaterParrott Railnet (CPR), a regional rail carrier that serves four rail lines and eleven counties in Georgia. Initially, the company started as a freight carrier but wanted to venture into a passenger component, thus establishing the Azalea Sprinter.

The idea for an excursion train came from years of CPR traveling through Southern communities, which inspired them to become more involved in those areas. Jamie Cater and Christopher Parrott, the Co-CEOs for CPR, say they always thought about what they could do to help the communities they travel through each day.

"In addition to pulling freight and being good partners, we have always wanted to add a passenger component to help boost tourism and economic development in those areas," said Parrott.

Currently, the train does have a single stop in Valdosta, but when word spread that Valdosta was interested in a depot location Downtown, Cater and Parrott jumped at the opportunity. The Mayor was introduced to the rail team through a mutual acquaintance, and as they continued to discuss this possibility, it became apparent that this partnership was a win-win. Not only will it allow CPR to expand its business model by becoming an all-inclusive rail operator, but it will bring further economic prospects into the city.

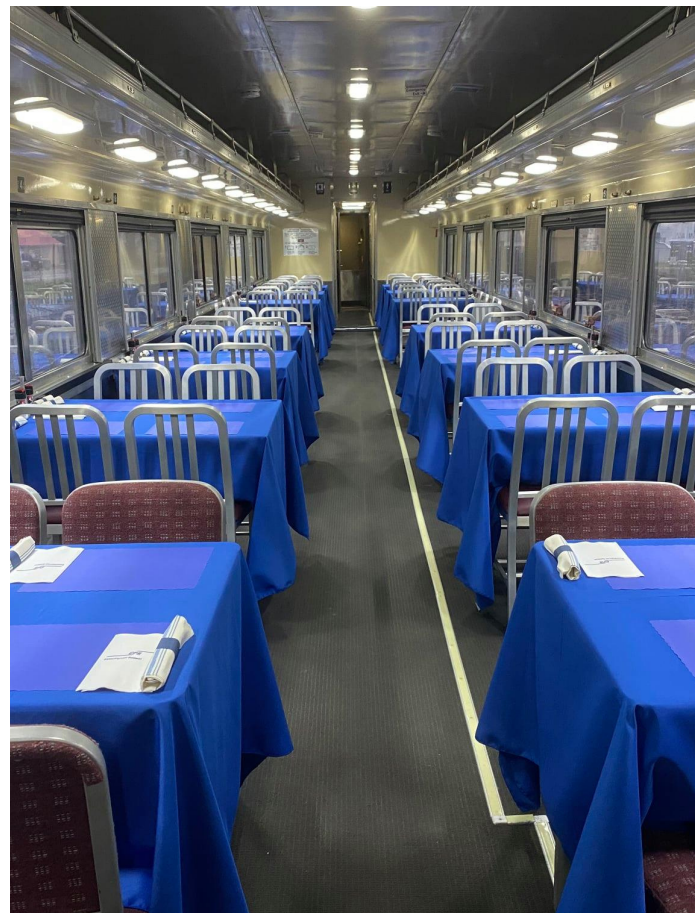
As passengers continuing to travel downtown, it will lead to an increase in tourism. People will naturally want to get off and walk around, eat, and shop before heading back to their original destination after riding the train. CPR predicts that this could lead to an influx of about 300 people a weekend based on the excitement they had seen during their March 13 launch. "We put this online, and we filled up three trains in less than two days," said Cater. As visitors continue to spend money in the city, investors may be motivated to open a restaurant, store, or buy a piece of blighted property and try to fix it up.



Azalea Sprinter has a max capacity of 130 people but is currently operating at half capacity due to COVID.

In turn, this influx in visitors will help increase property values, create jobs for residents, and based on an economist study by Valdosta State University; it could bring in three to five million dollars in additional annual revenue. “This could bring \$3-5 million annually and would pay for the investment within the first 15 months. We did all of that without talking about an overnight stay. We went conservative – talking about only 30 rides a year. Norfolk Southern and the Georgia Department of Transportation have proved to be great partners. Now, as we are more than halfway through the planning process on this project, we can talk about this with excitement as it is a strong possibility that this could happen,” said Mayor Scott James Matheson. Of course, that amount has the potential to increase as interest in the Sprinter grows.

Though there is no launch date for the downtown Valdosta depot location, Mayor Matheson is highly optimistic about this possibility.



For more information on all the amenities, the Azalea Sprinter has to offer and book your ticket today, be sure to visit <https://azaleasprinter.com>.



NEIGHBORHOOD ACTION ASSOCIATIONS

DEVENWOOD NAA

WENDELIN HODGES AT THE DEVENWOOD INFORMATION BOARD



If you drive through the Devonwood neighborhood, you cannot escape the feeling that you are traveling back in time. The historical integrity of the homes and scenery have been well persevered overcoming the test of time. The same could be said when looking at the residents themselves as no group better displays the phrase Southern hospitality. It is no coincidence that this neighborhood has successfully launched the city's first Neighborhood Action Association (NAA). NAA programs go hand in hand with the city's Love Where You Live Campaign. They were created to bring people from the community together, help one another, take pride in where we live, and get involved in the city's beautification.

Teresa Turner, the Community Sustainability Coordinator for the city of Valdosta, oversees all NAAs' implementation. She works closely with Community Policing Officer Randal Handcock to reach out to residents to get the program started within selected neighborhoods. Currently, 17 areas are eligible for participation in an NAA. These neighborhoods were established using the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) criteria, which is where the funding comes from to provide residence with resources. The grant funding aims to support low to mod income neighborhoods, so Turner has used that list as a starting point, thus the 17 eligible communities. "When getting them started, I try to pick one in a different district every time, so they are not all in the same place. I plan to alternate districts until I get all 17 neighborhoods, but if a citizen from one of those neighborhoods reaches out and says they want an NAA in their area, then we will help get them started," said Turner.

The overall goal is to get an NAA up and running in all 17 communities, but so far, Devonwood has been the first and only to gain its footing. The Devonwood chapter was started in February of 2019. Turner considered it her prototype for how future chapters would function. Through trial and error, she was able to map out what works well when structuring future NAAs. "We wanted to get all the kinks worked out and figure out what worked and what didn't before starting in other areas. Of course, COVID hit, and that delayed everything. People didn't want to meet or get together, so we held off and eased into it at the end of last year, but I am determined to have at least four going by the end of this year," said Turner. She is currently working with residents in the Hightower and Cypress communities for future NAAs.



**Teresa Turner, Valdosta City
Community Sustainability
Coordinator**

Though Turner helps get the associations started, it is essential to note that these are not city organizations meaning that the city steps in as a resource when needed. Still, an NAA is primarily run by residents within that community. Resources can include assisting in cleanups and providing materials or guidance.

Turner also coordinates with the residents to assist in any way she can. She says, "We coordinate with each other, and I send out group texts saying where the meeting is. If they have an event, I will print out flyers and deliver them. They will pass all that out and get the community involved."

However, each NAA is responsible for hosting its meetings and has the freedom to plan its own events. The Devonwood community, for example, has hosted events like truck-or-treat and toy-for-tots drive so far but plan to do more in the upcoming months.

As a participant in the Devonwood NAA, Wendelin Hodges is thrilled to see the positive impact it has had within her neighborhood. "I think what it does is it brings people together and makes them want to do something more positive. It helps us become more of a community and helps us to depend on each other," said Hodges.

"The NAA keeps me active. It makes me feel good and like I am doing something within my community."

She refers to the neighborhood information board where they post things like the monthly meeting schedule, families that may be expecting and need a little extra help, or any upcoming events. Recently the board was decorated with posters of achievements by those made throughout black history in honor of Black History Month.

Hodges is thankful for all the city's help, as she believes it has allowed the neighborhood to flourish. She uses the field behind the information board where the city cleared the overgrown brush and trees. With the area clear, the NAA plans to get a community garden planted shortly. Wendelin says that in addition to helping her neighborhood, the organization has helped her on a personal level. "The NAA keeps me active. It makes me feel good and like I am doing something within my community," said Hodges.

17 COMMUNITIES ELIGIBLE FOR AN NAA

Kill me Quick Community

Brook Haven Community

Brookwood Community

Central Bus District Community

Cypress Community

Devonwood Community

Greer Park Community

Hightower Community

Leila Ellis Community

Lincoln Park Community

Little Miami Community

North Patterson Street Community

Pineville Community

South Side Community

Tom Town Community

Ulmer Avenue Community

West Side Community

For more information about the NAA program and how to start one in your neighborhood please call Teresa Turner at 229-671-3614



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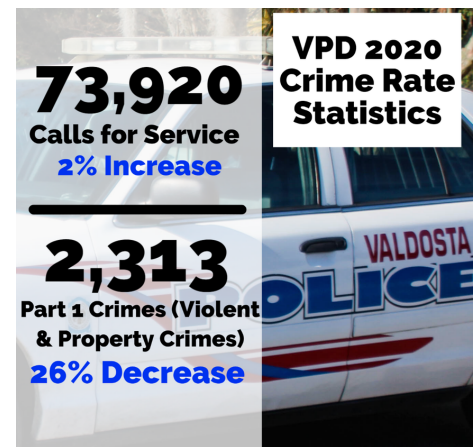
C R I M E

S T A T S

**Valdosta Police
Chief Leslie
Manahan**
discusses how the
department has
taken preventative
measure to help
reduce crime in our
area.



VPD REPORTED 70 FEWER BURGLARIES IN 2020

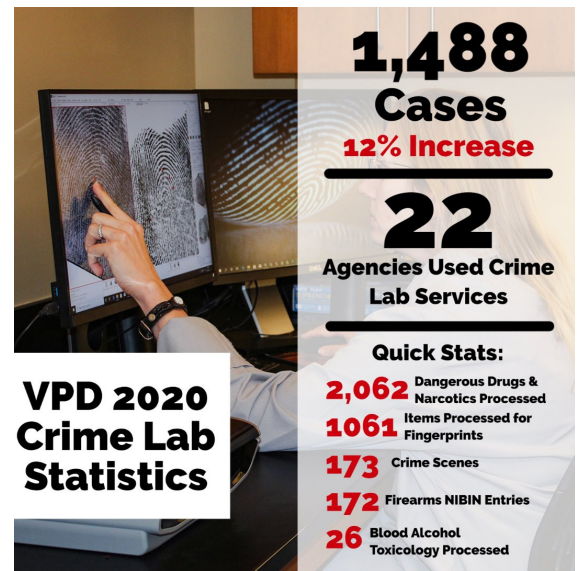


In 2020 the Valdosta Police Department experienced a decrease in overall crime rate despite receiving an increase in calls to service. Police Chief Leslie Manahan attributes this to preventative measures the department has taken to help reduce crime in the area and acknowledges the role the COVID-19 Pandemic played across the Nation.

It was apparent that 2020 was a challenging year for many, and the city of Valdosta was no exception. Some residents' experienced wage and job loss due to reduced hours, some businesses had to close their doors for a period of time, and our world began to look much different than we were accustomed to. Through it all, members of the Valdosta Police Department pushed through and strived to provide the same high-quality level of service to the community.

It is partly because of these efforts that the department saw a significant drop in part-one crimes, specifically burglary. Part one crimes are classified as anything that is reported as an actual criminal offense and includes violent crimes and property crimes. In 2019 VPD responded to 2,921 part-one crimes; this number decreased to 2,313 in 2020. Chief Manahan says the department had quite a decrease in property crimes, with approximately 70 fewer burglaries than the previous year. "I think it had a little to do with the Pandemic and people staying home," she said but did not downplay the preventative measures the department has utilized as well.

Assets such as the Neighborhood Walk Program and burglary walk-through assistance seemed to be especially valuable. The neighborhood walk program helps decrease crime mainly because it allows the department to interact with residents in a more relaxed environment. Members from VPD and VFD will select a community, go door to door, introduce themselves to the residents, and ask if they can be of any assistance.



Chief Manahan believes this helps strengthen the relationship between the department and community by saying, "Sometimes people will pull you aside and let you know about a house they are concerned with. Afterward, when they see something in their neighborhood, they are more willing to call 911 because they know that we are in their neighborhood trying to do what we need to do to help them."

Another preventative measure that assists with keeping crime rates low is the burglary walk-through assistance offered by Officer Randle Handcock and Investigator Keith Harold. The two will go to resident's homes upon request and survey the house for any potential issues that may make the owners more susceptible to a robbery. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, the department would frequently visit businesses and schools to discuss robbery prevention and bullying topics. Chief Manahan hopes to assure the public that the department is working tirelessly to keep crime rates low through preventative measures by saying, "You name it, and we have a program for it."

She offers additional tips to citizens like don't advertise when you buy new products at your house by leaving boxes on the street, make sure you don't leave valuables in your vehicles, and always lock your doors. The department is dedicated to public safety education and often post similar tips on their social media pages that they hope will help minimize resident's risks.

Not only was the department able to help reduce the occurrence of burglaries, but they also saw an increase in recovered property, meaning that they were able to locate and return items to residents that may have been the victims of a robbery or burglary.

"We recovered over a million dollars in property in 2020 that we could return to the victim. You feel bad when someone is a victim of a crime, but when you can produce something for them, that helps." Said Chief Manahan.

Unfortunately, due to the rise of stress during stay-at-home measures, the department did respond to more arguments and domestic violence type of crimes and experienced an increase in homicides. Cases doubled from five homicides in 2019 to ten in 2020, but officers and detectives were able to solve the majority of these crimes quickly and to the point that the offender had been arrested.

This, of course, could not be done without the help of the forensics team at the VPD Crime Lab. Over 2020 the lab was able to process 1,061 items for fingerprints and 173 crime scenes. In addition, the lab also processed 2,062 cases of dangerous drugs and narcotics and retrieved 172 firearms.

Though the department stayed hard at work even, they felt the sting of the Pandemic. Some officers had to deal with family care, a partner being out of work, and even having to miss themselves after a COVID scare, but the department had to persevere for its community. Chief Manahan is proud of the level of service they have continued to provide and says that their ability to respond to more calls yet lower crime rates speaks volumes. "I think it shows in our officers to step up and continue to do a fantastic job this year and not let anything get them down. They still came into work, they did their jobs, and they prevented crime," said Chief Manahan.

STAY INFORMED



Are there any city functions, programs, or departments you'd like to know more about? Feel free to submit your ideas for City Beat features to our Public Information Office at info@valdostacity.com.

There is a possibility your suggestion can be featured in our next issue!

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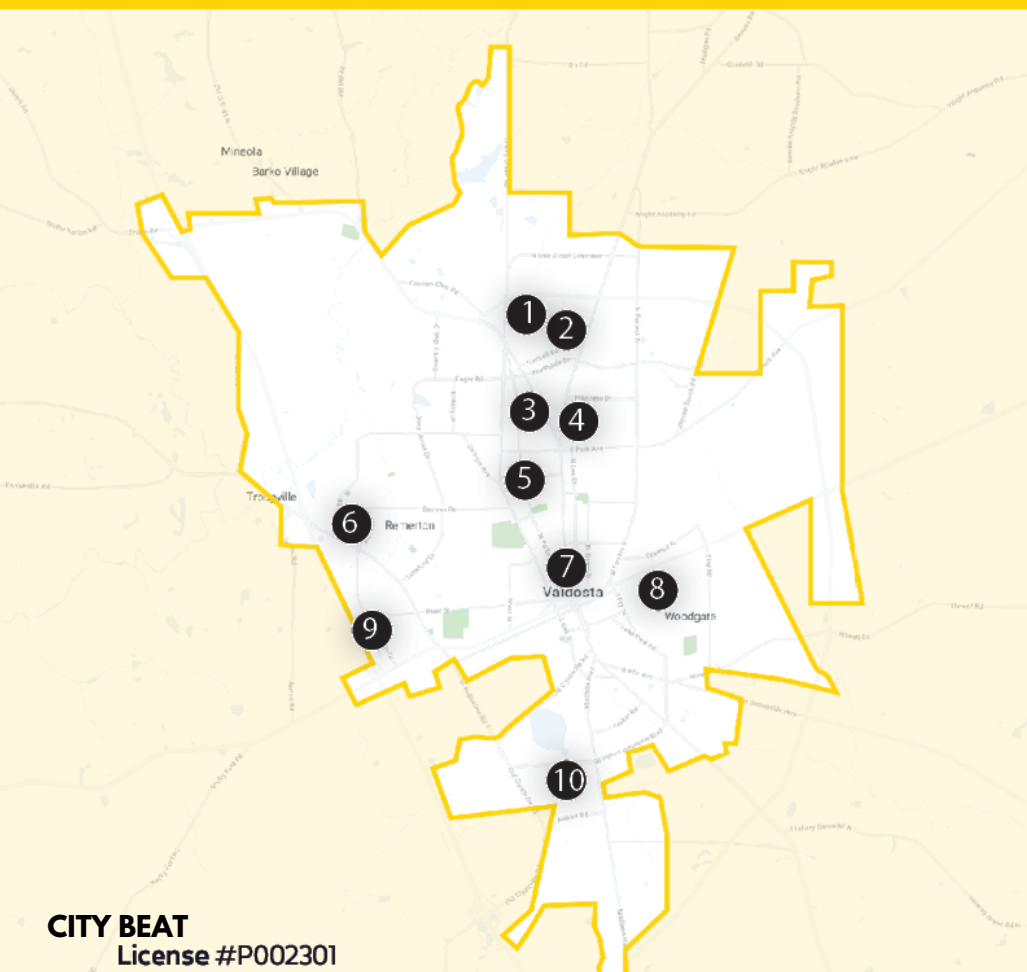
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the whole city without needing a car.

Service hours:

Monday-Friday 6am-9pm.

Popular destinations:

- ① Wal-Mart on Inner Perimeter Rd
- ② South Georgia Regional Library (Julia Drive)
- ③ South Georgia Medical Center
- ④ Castle Park Shopping Center
- ⑤ Valdosta State University
- ⑥ Valdosta Mall
- ⑦ Downtown Valdosta (old courthouse as the point)
- ⑧ Mildred Hunter Community Center
- ⑨ Wal-Mart on Norman Dr
- ⑩ Azalea Business Park



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to get started.

