

Bridging the gap between the community and police

Mike Argento , margento@ydr.com 6:33 a.m. ET March 13, 2017

Crispus Attucks is recognizing three law enforcement agencies for their work to improve relations with the minority community.



In February 2016, Springgettsbury Township Police Chief Daniel Stump, after some soul searching about how his department could develop a stronger relationship with the community it serves, contacted the U.S. Justice Department, asking its Office of Justice Program's Diagnostic Center to take a look at his department.

He didn't have to do it. It was voluntary, placing his department under a microscope in an effort to improve.

"It's not very easy to open your doors and ask people in and identify your problems and say, by the way, we're going to share that with everyone," Stump said. "The easy path is not always the best path."

As part of that review, the chief reached out to a diverse group of organizations to play a role in the examination. Included in that group was the Crispus Attucks Community Association and the Black Ministers Association.

"That's unheard of," said Bobby Simpson, CA's long-time CEO. "That takes vision and takes guts. He didn't have to do that. I was impressed by Chief Stump."

Because of that, next Sunday, when CA holds its annual meeting, the Springgettsbury Township chief and his department will be among three law enforcement agencies to receive the association's Heart of Change Community Service Awards.

The other recipients of the awards are York County Sheriff Richard Keuerleber and York City Police Chief Wes Kahley.

The idea goes beyond recognizing the work of the law enforcement agencies, Simpson said. It is intended to be part of an ongoing effort to improve the relationship between the minority community and law enforcement, especially in light of recent events across the nation that have damaged that relationship -- Ferguson, Baltimore, Chicago, Dallas and elsewhere.



Robert L. Simpson, chief executive officer for Crispus Attucks Association in York, stands beside a painting he keeps over his desk. It reminds him to reach down to those least fortunate, he said.

"In my lifetime," Simpson said, "I've never seen police departments want to reach out and try to help all of us bridge that gap between the minority community and the police. These three departments have really gone above board to do some re-thinking how law enforcement should be reacting in the community. That takes vision and foresight to want to do that."

The sheriff's department has been working with Crispus Attucks for years, its deputies volunteering for mentoring programs and working with youth at the center.

It's paid off, in more ways than one.



Sheriff Richard Keuerleber

Some time ago, Keuerleber said, one of the deputies who mentors kids at the center had some four-wheelers stolen from his shed.

"The kids in the program found out about it and the four-wheelers were back on his lawn the next day, no questions asked," the sheriff said. "That's an example of positive peer pressure."

And evidence of the relationship, and trust, the deputy had built with the kids.



Chief Wes Kahley

Kahley was recognized for his continuing efforts to strengthen the department's community policing program and expanding the effort to bring police closer to the people they serve with community police stations and increased staffing of those stations.

The recognition of the law enforcement agencies is a step toward expanding on those relationships and building trust between police and the community they serve.

"This is not a short-term thing," Simpson said.

"If they are willing to extend a hand, we should be willing to extend a hand back to do what we can to improve our communities. Is it going to be easy? No. But they are reaching out, and we are reaching back and together, we can make this thing work."

To attend

What: The Crispus Attucks Association's 86th Annual Meeting

When: 3 p.m. March 19

Where: The Crispus Attucks Community Center, 605 S. Duke St., York

Also: Retired York County Judge John Uhler is the keynote speaker. The program is free and open to the public.

For more information about the organization, visit crispusattucks.org.