

Philanthropy Corner – 10-23-11

“Police Department Exceeds Expectations and the Call to Duty”

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When we think about our governmental law enforcement agencies, we might not typically associate them with philanthropy. But the Key West Police Department (KWPD) does much more than crime prevention, preservation of our personal liberties, and protection of the lives and property of citizens and visitors of this community. The charitable activities our local KWPD law enforcement officers and employees engage in go above and beyond their call of duty to public service.

The Sixth Annual Police Officer’s Ball is one example of the many charitable activities of the KWPD that demonstrates their commitment to their fellow officers. The Ball is a fundraiser for the Police Officer’s Love Fund that took place last weekend. The KWPD Love Fund is an incorporated 501(c)(3) charitable organization established in 2006 to assist law enforcement officers and support personnel and their immediate families during catastrophic illnesses and personal tragedies. Proceeds from the event provide aid to officers and their families when no other resources are available. The Fund helps officers and their families during an illness or treatment for medical emergencies, damage to their homes, or other events that threaten their ability to serve the community. The fund also supports spouses and children of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty or who die of natural causes as a result of their service to the profession. When two of their officers were called out of the Army reserves and deployed overseas to serve our country, the KWPD put together a care package with the help of donations from the City Fire Department and Human Resources to ship overseas.

In addition to caring for their fellow law enforcement officers, members of the KWPD are also quick to show their support and help raise awareness for other charitable causes such as the Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics and the Cancer Society of America’s Relay for Life. Their involvement also extends beyond the needs of our citizens. Two police officers are responsible for saving some thirty baby sea turtles from dying when they hatched on Smathers Beach a few years ago.

Another 501(c)(3) charitable organization under the KWPD is the Police Athletic League (PAL). PAL is a recreation oriented, juvenile crime prevention program creating positive relationships between youth, police and the community. The program helps children develop skills, self-esteem, trust and respect through quality youth sports and educational programs. PAL offers basketball leagues, wrestling, weightlifting programs, amateur boxing and training in the martial art of judo. Since its inception, PAL teams and individual participants have qualified to attend championships and won state and regional titles.

The Key West Police Mounted Patrol is supported primarily through tax-deductible contributions from individuals, businesses and organizations. The City’s first Mounted Patrol Unit was formed in 1999. The horses in the equestrian unit are privately owned and made available to the KWPD at no cost to the City or taxpayers. The private owners are responsible for the day to day needs of the animals such as feed and veterinary services. Volunteers are recruited to help care for the animals and financial support is needed for specific police duty equipment.

The KWPD “envision[s] itself becoming the most effective, efficient Police Department in Florida in total partnership with our citizens and visitors.” Both the Love Fund and PAL are philanthropic partners of the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys (CFFK). As charitable organizations,

representatives from the Love Fund and PAL have participated in the Leadership Success Academy (LSA) and Unsung Heroes/Volunteers of the Year Awards Luncheon. Leadership Success Academy 2010 graduate and KWPD Love Fund President, Lieutenant Jim Benkoczy states, “The training that I received through the Community Foundation has helped us plan and ensure that the Fund will be vital for many years to come.”

The charitable activities of the KWPD exemplify their commitment to serve our community. They keep giving us much more than we expect by going above and beyond their day to day job of protecting paradise.

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