

Summary of
MAMMOTH LAKES POLICE-COMMUNITY HISPANIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE
(MLPCHAC)

The Town of Mammoth Lakes has implemented, through its Police Department with support from the Mono County Superior Court and other public and private organizations, a program that has succeeded in improving relations, building trust, and communications between the Hispanic community, law enforcement, local government and the justice system.

The Town of Mammoth Lakes is a ski resort in the Eastern Sierra. With a year round population of 8,200 residents, the Town can swell to 35,000 people on a busy ski weekend. The Town has a large number of hotels, restaurants, sporting goods stores and other businesses that cater to the tourist population. The Town has a high percentage of service workers who keep this business open. Mammoth Lakes is the only incorporated city in Mono County, and accounts for nearly 2/3 of the county population. The rest of Mono County is rural and the economy is based on agriculture and summer recreation.

It is estimated that Mammoth Lakes is approximately 50% Hispanic, with an unknown, but significant percentage of that group being undocumented.

The current police chief has been in office since July 2010. Before coming to Mammoth he spent several years as the Police Chief in South Pasadena which has a large Chinese population. He started his career with the Los Angeles Police Department where, during his 28 year career there, he worked in many ethnic communities.

Upon assuming command of the Mammoth Lakes Police Department (MLPD), the Chief was quickly made aware by two Spanish speaking bi-lingual, bi-cultural officers that there was a serious disconnect between the MLPD and the Hispanic community, especially the immigrant and non-English speaking community. The officers said there had been virtually no efforts to communicate with, understand, or build trust with this large segment of the population.

Using references provided by the officers, the Chief reached out to a number of key stakeholders. They represented the hotel industry, social services, the Courts, the battered women's support organization, and other individuals with the ability to understand and communicate to the Hispanic community. The group met for the first time in the Fall of 2010 and after naming themselves, came up with a Mission Statement:

It is the mission of the Mammoth Lakes Police-Community Hispanic Advisory Committee to build a bridge of communication and understanding between law enforcement and the Hispanic community to improve relations and trust in each other through education and cultural collaboration while improving the quality of life for all residents.

One of the members, a management level employee with one of the large hotels, wasn't sure there was a problem that needed fixing – until he met with many of his housekeeping employees and employees

from other hotels. He heard a series of rumors and horror stories about how the police only wrote tickets to Latinos, people were stopped without probable cause, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) were requested to conduct sweeps of employers by local law enforcement, and other abuses. These perceptions allowed the police chief to look into the complaints and provide some explanations such as an audit of traffic citations issued that showed 25% of citations were issued to people with Hispanic surnames.

The Committee focused on how to best support the mission statement and quickly concluded that a Town Hall meeting where information would be provided to the residents and questions answered by law enforcement would be a good first step. In the advertising for the meetings, the term "Town Hall" was translated into Spanish and would be the English equivalent of "town meeting" or "community forum." It was decided that several speakers would provide information on services provided followed by a break for dinner. After dinner, the Police Chief and Mono County Sheriff would answer any questions from the audience. Interpreters, child care, and index cards so questions could be asked anonymously were provided. The Mammoth Mountain Ski Area provided a meeting room at no costs and several restaurants provided food at no cost.

The first Town Hall was scheduled for the Spring of 2011. The Committee was nervous about the turnout. The meeting was advertised in the local English and Spanish speaking media, flyers were posted throughout town, and the Committee members spread the word through their contacts.

The Committee need not have worried. There was standing room only with over 100 in attendance. Attendance of 100 people may not seem to be significant, but in a community where total population is only 8,200, 100 people represents over 1% of the local population. The first presenter was a representative of the Mexican Consulate in Sacramento. He encouraged the audience to participate, have faith in the program, and be good citizens. He told the audience that if they wanted to live in the U.S. and not have problems, they needed to do three things: Learn English, obtain a DMV handbook and learn the California driving laws, and avoid domestic violence. Representatives from the Consulate have appeared at most of the other Town Halls and their presence has been very valuable in establishing credibility for the efforts to improve relations.

Other speakers at the first Town Hall provided information on public housing, domestic violence services, recreational opportunities, youth services, and living with wildlife.

After the break, the question and answer period began. The audience was reserved and nearly all of the questions were asked by way of index card. Many of the questions dealt with the relationship between local law enforcement and ICE, vehicle impounds, drivers licenses, and rumors about law enforcement. The questions were answered honestly.

That first Town Hall lasted nearly six hours. Initial feedback from the Committee members was that it was well received by the public. The Committee decided that the success warranted additional Town Halls. Since that first Town Hall, additional meetings have been held twice a year, in the Spring and Fall, in what is known as the "shoulder seasons" when tourism is at its lowest.

The second Town Hall was held at the newly constructed Superior Court building in Mammoth Lakes and hosted by its Chief Executive Officer. Attendance was down, perhaps due in part to fear of going to the location. Still, the turnout was robust with approximately 70 in attendance, and the format was similar to the first Town Hall.

Additional presentations have been made by representatives of organizations such as the District Attorney to explain the criminal justice system, the CEO of the Superior Court explaining the judicial system, the Department of Motor Vehicles to explain licensing requirements, the California Highway Patrol (CHP), Behavioral Health, the Mammoth Unified School District providing information on bullying, and an immigration rights attorney who has spoken on the Dream Act, immigration procedures, etc. The Mexican Consulate and Wild Iris, the local domestic violence women's shelter, have standing invitations to speak. Volunteer support and donations for the Town Halls continue to be strong. Meeting rooms, food, beverages and childcare have been generously donated by local businesses. The committee has consciously placed the responsibility for soliciting donations upon the community members of the committee and not the members from governmental agencies. This is one of the many benefits of having a committee that combines both community members and government officials.

Each of the subsequent Town Halls has included the questions and answers with the Chief and Sheriff. Recently, the local CHP commander has been part of this portion of the program.

So how successful have the MLPCHAC Town Halls been? Surveys have not been conducted, but anecdotal feedback to the Committee members indicate that there is far less fear, more trust, and a better relationship between the community and police. A better measure is the demeanor of the crowd. Tension and anxiety was palpable in the first Town Hall. People were reluctant to speak. Each Town Hall since then has shown an increase in the noise level. Very few participants now rely on index cards to ask their questions. Participants are willing to admit past transgressions. There is laughter and almost a fiesta atmosphere. The Committee sees this as a positive sign that the Mission Statement is being achieved.

Perhaps the best measure of success is based on who has been invited to the next Town Hall. Because of mistrust in the community of ICE, they have not been asked to participate. At the most recent Town Hall, in November 2013, the audience was asked if they would like to have a representative of ICE attend. There was a resounding positive response. An invitation has been extended and is being reviewed by ICE management.

The need for the MLPCHAC and its Town Halls will likely never end. There will always be issues surfacing in the community that require a response. The efforts of the MLPCHAC have resulted in lines of communication from concerned community members through Committee members, to local law enforcement. And the need to educate the community about programs, services, and the law will always exist. The Committee does not see a sunset for their work.

The role of the Superior Court has been significant. Many of the questions and concerns deal with the legal system and there will always be a need to explain how it works in the U.S. The CEO of the Superior

Court has been an instrumental member of the committee. He is bi-lingual and bi-cultural, and that has been beneficial in building trust and communication.



POLICE DEPARTMENT

P.O. Box 2799
568 Old Mammoth Road
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546
760-934-2011 • fax 760-934-2490
www.mammothlakespd.org

MAMMOTH LAKES POLICE-COMMUNITY HISPANIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mission Statement

It is the Mission of the Mammoth Lakes Police-Community Hispanic Advisory Committee (Committee) to build a bridge of communication and understanding between law enforcement and the Hispanic community to improve relations and trust in each other through education and cultural collaboration while improving the quality of life for all residents.

Declaración de Objetivos

La Misión de el Consejo Hispano del Departamento de Policía de Mammoth Lakes (Consejo Hispano) es construir un puente de comunicación y comprensión entre el orden publico y la comunidad Hispana para mejorar las relaciones y confianza mutua a través de una colaboración cultural y educativa al mismo tiempo que mejoramos la calidad de vida de todos los residentes.

El Consejo Hispano ha organizado foros de la comunidad que ha proporcionado las presentaciones de la comunidad hispana en Español e Inglés en una serie de diferentes temas como los servicios prestados por el consulado mexicano a los ciudadanos mexicanos que viven en el Condado de Mono y lo que usted necesita para obtener una licencia de conducir del Departamento de Vehículos Motorizados. Estamos planeando otro foro comunitario en noviembre y quiere escuchar a la comunidad sobre qué temas deberíamos tener presentaciones para la comunidad hispana. Por favor, escriba los temas que le gustaría tener en presentaciones a continuación (*The committee has organized community forums that has provided the Hispanic community presentations in Spanish and English on a number of different subjects such as services provided by the Mexican consulate to Mexican citizens living in Mono County and what you need to get a driver's license from the Department of Motor Vehicles. We are planning another community forum in November and want hear from the community on what subjects we should have presentations for the Hispanic community. Please write the subjects you would like to have presentations on below*):

1. . _____.

2. . _____.

3. . _____.