

Barnegat Police Department



Community Survey Report 2008

Prepared by Lieutenant Keith Germain

June 2008

Introduction

The Barnegat Police Department has conducted its first community survey to assist in gauging public perception of the police department and its performance.

In May of 2008, 1,000 people were randomly selected from a list of Barnegat taxpayers. 369 or 36.9% of the surveys were returned to the department. While we have no way to gauge the return percentage versus past surveys, a check of surveys from other departments shows that our return rate was high.

Return of surveys from the geographic locations in town were in line with expectations with 41% of the returned surveys coming from age restricted communities. More surprising was the age demographic associated with returns. Of all surveys returned, over 70% were from residents 50 years of age or older.

Overall results were very encouraging. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest, the survey respondents rated the department's overall performance at an average of 4.3.

Data Analysis

Questions 1 through 5: Department Contact and Related Performance

Of the 369 respondents, 62.2% had contact with the department during the prior 36 months. Table A shows a breakdown of the circumstances under which contact was made. Table B shows the person with which contact was made, and Table C shows the performance ratings in each of the 8 categories as well as overall performance.

Table A shows that most contact (33%) was made via telephone with mostly communications officers and patrol officers. Informal contact was the second most common form at just over 16%. These numbers show that the telephone demeanor of both dispatchers and police officers has a large impact on the public's perception of the department as this type of contact accounts for nearly one-third of the final reported contact in the survey.

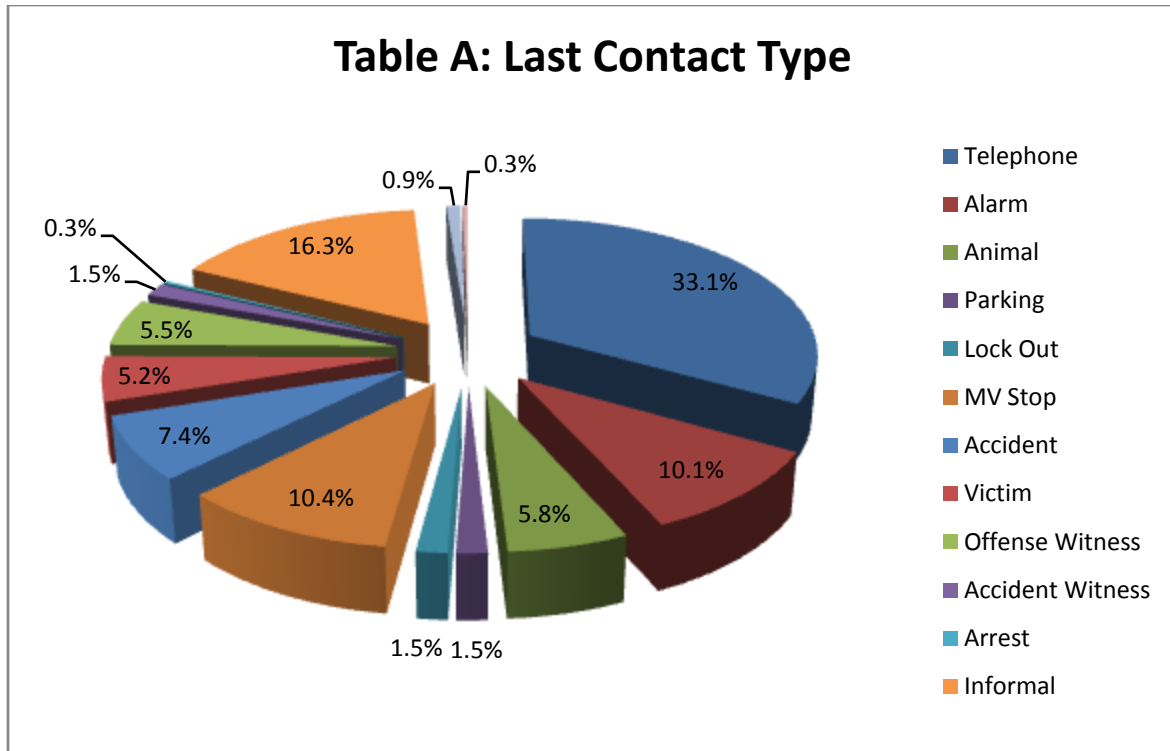


Table B shows that nearly 60% of the reported last contacts were with uniformed patrol officers. Taking this into account with the overall performance numbers shows that the department is doing a more than adequate job of addressing the needs of the residents.

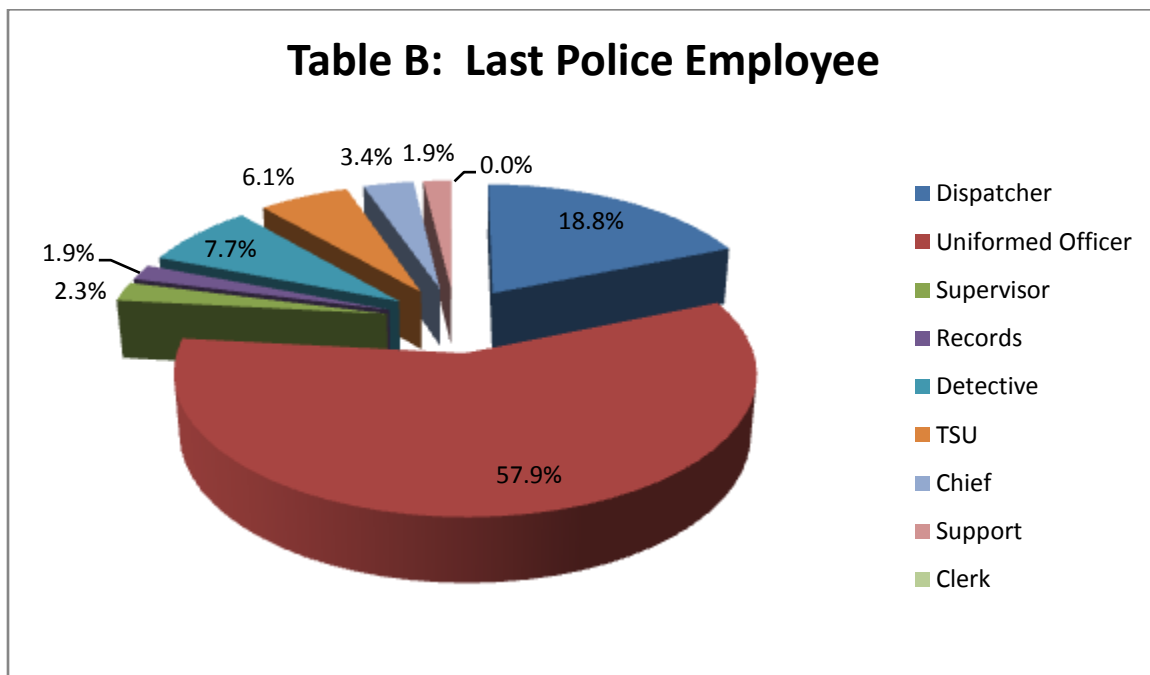
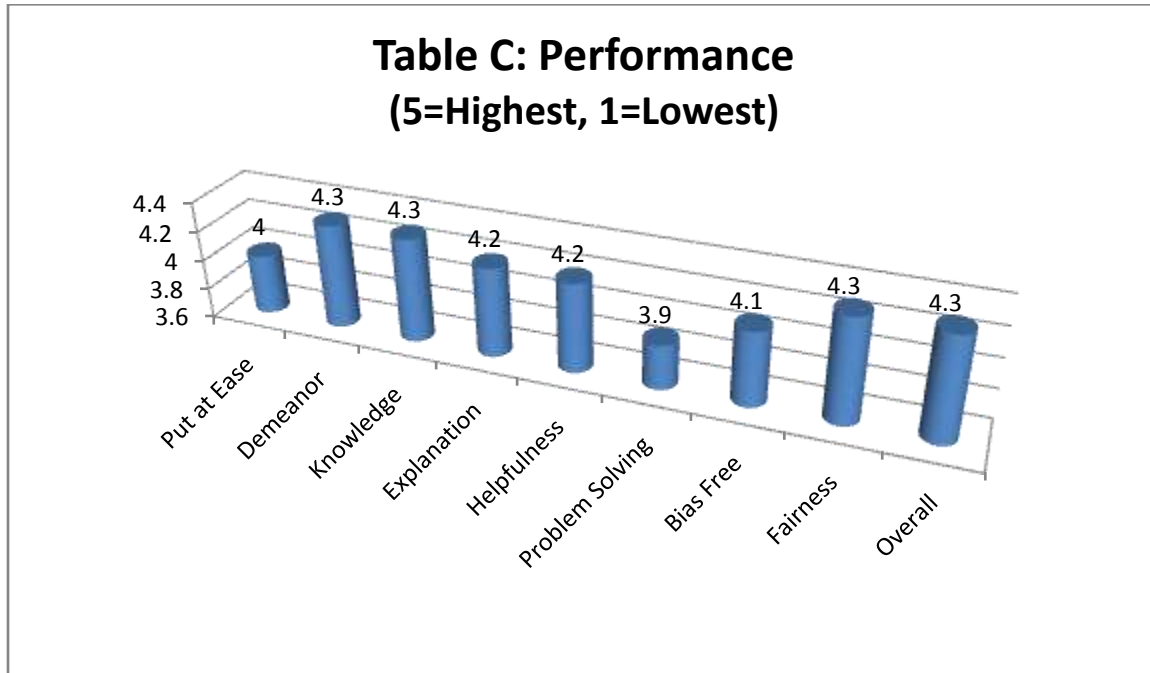
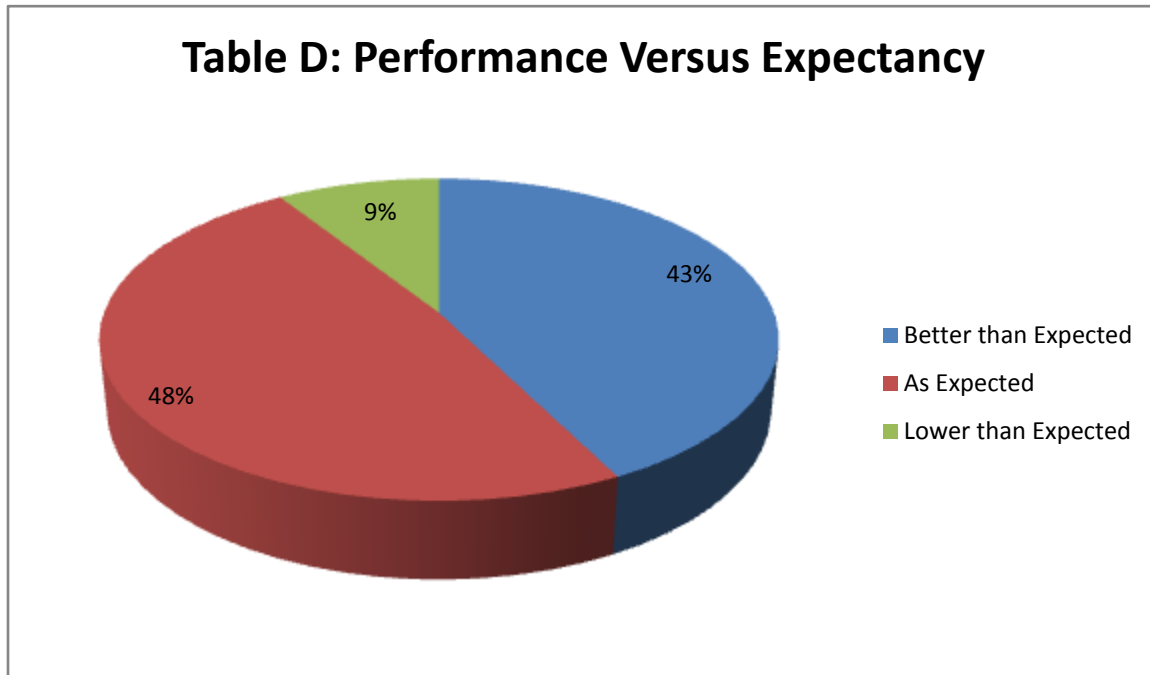


Table C shows the performance ratings in 8 subcategories as well as overall. Ease, demeanor, and knowledge all shared the highest rating of 4.3 while problem solving was the lowest rated category at 3.9.



With this being the first department survey, we lack any reliable data with which to evaluate any trending of our perceived performance. Absent this trending availability, the next best indicator may be question #5 which dealt with whether the quality of service the respondents received from the agency was higher than, lower than, or as expected. Over 90% of respondents received service which they perceived to be either what they expected or better than what they expected. Only 9.1% felt that the service received was lower than expected.

Of note is that 42.5% of respondents believed the service they received was higher than expected. While that is indicative of an improved department, logic would dictate that moving forward people will begin to expect such a level of service. A consequence of this may be that in future surveys the results for this question will trend towards the expected category with the potential for an increase in lower than expected if we do not maintain the current level of service.



Neighborhood Issues

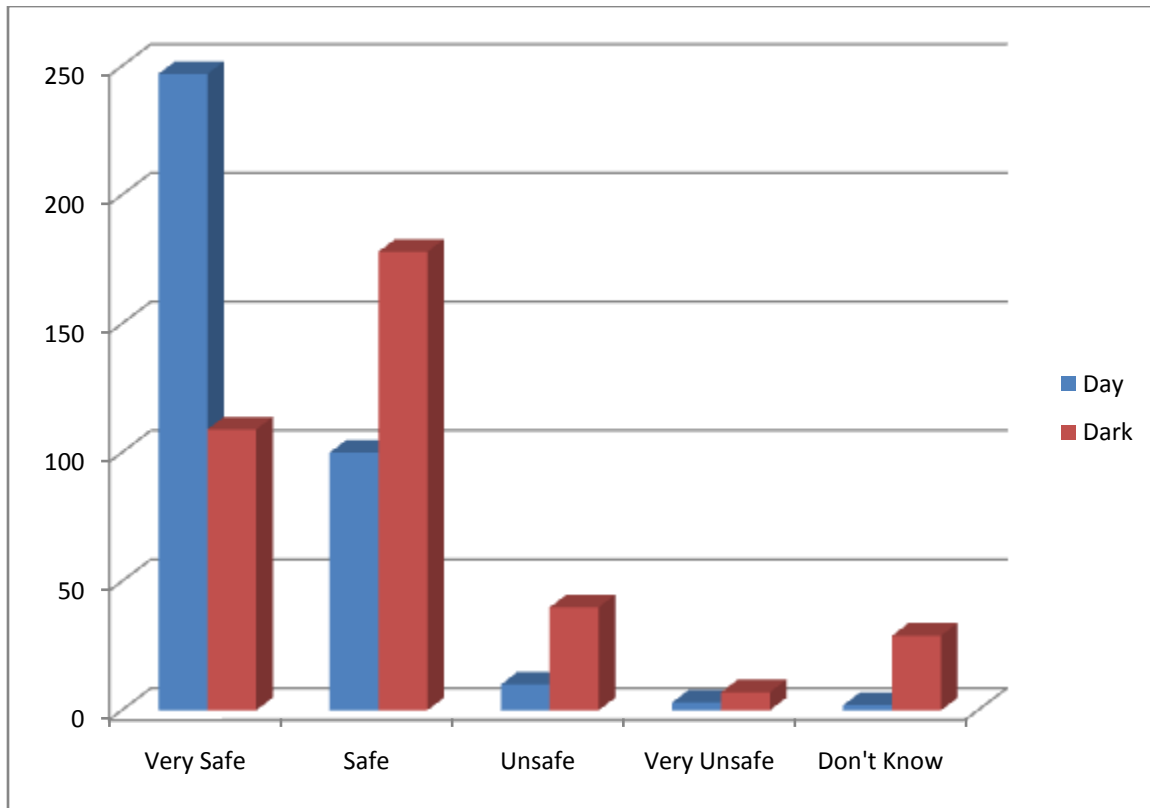
Questions 6-8: Perceived Safety and Neighborhood Problems

Questions 6 and 7 dealt with the respondent’s feeling of safety while walking alone in their neighborhoods both during the day and at night respectively. Overall , 95.8% of respondents felt either very safe or safe during the day. This number dropped to 79% at night. Studies show that regardless of neighborhood, night time is often perceived by individuals to be more dangerous than daytime. This is mostly based upon the stereotype that many criminals have a proclivity to operate after dark, as well as the limiting of human vision (the sense upon which we rely the most) at night. A natural consequence of this decrease in our most relied upon sense is a diminished feeling of security.

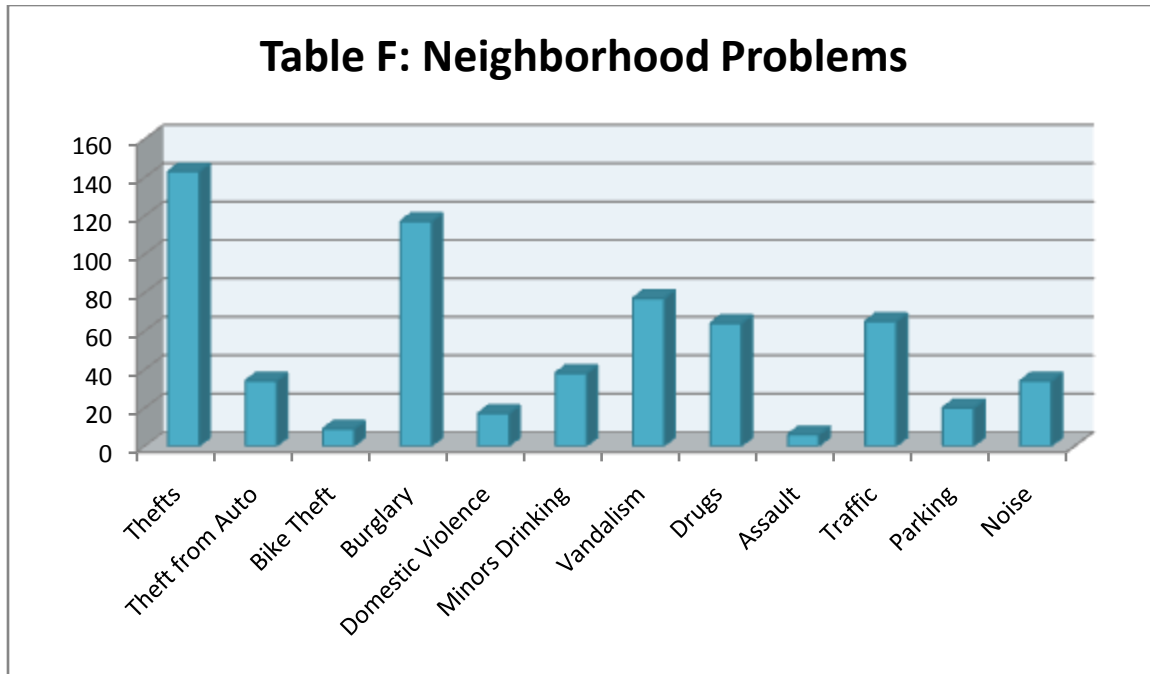
Of interest is that virtually every one of the respondents who indicated that they felt either unsafe or very unsafe reported living in the area of town west of Route 9 and south of West Bay Avenue.

Table E below shows a breakdown of perceived safety responses.

Table E: Perceived Safety



Question 8 dealt with what were perceived as the most important issues facing the respondent’s neighborhood. Respondents were encouraged to select all that applied allowing for multiple responses. Of the 665 individual selections made by the respondents, thefts were the most prevalent issue with 143 selections, burglaries were second with 117, while vandalism, traffic, and drugs were 3rd, 4th, and 5th respectively. It is possible that the recent publicity concerning daytime residential burglaries has affected the distribution of perceived concerns. Subsequent surveys may well show a trend away from the current results. Table F details the results for this question.



Questions 9-10: Reporting of Crime

Question 9 asked respondents if, over the past year, all criminal incidents against the respondent or their household were reported to this agency. Of the 369 respondents, only 12 indicated that they failed to report incidents. Half of the 12 failed to report one incident, 4 failed to report 2 incidents, and 2 failed to report 3 incidents.

When asked in question 10 to cite the reasons that they failed to report the incident, the most prevalent response was that they didn't think that it would do any good, followed closely by a response that they didn't think that it was important enough.

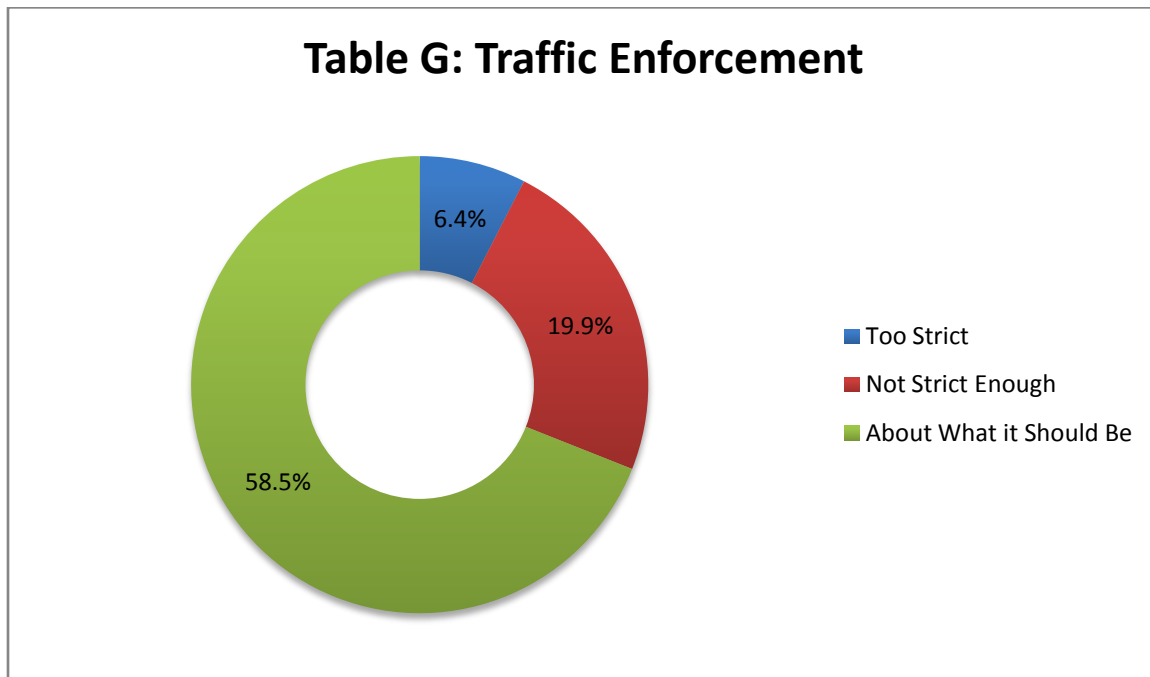
While the number of unreported incidents may seem inconsequential at first, if the numbers are extrapolated out to the total number of residences in town, the adjusted corollary would be approximately 420 unreported incidents. Knowing that any one of these incidents may prove to yield fruitful information with relation to other offenses in town, the department will need to continue to stress the importance of reporting all offenses to our residents.

Questions 11-12: Traffic Enforcement

Question 11 asked if the respondent had received a traffic ticket for a moving violation in Barnegat during the prior three years. In retrospect, this question will be altered in the future to specify receiving a traffic ticket from a Barnegat officer as these results could conceivably be skewed by tickets issued by the State Police. 95.1% of respondents reported that they had not received a ticket, while 4.4% reported being ticketed.

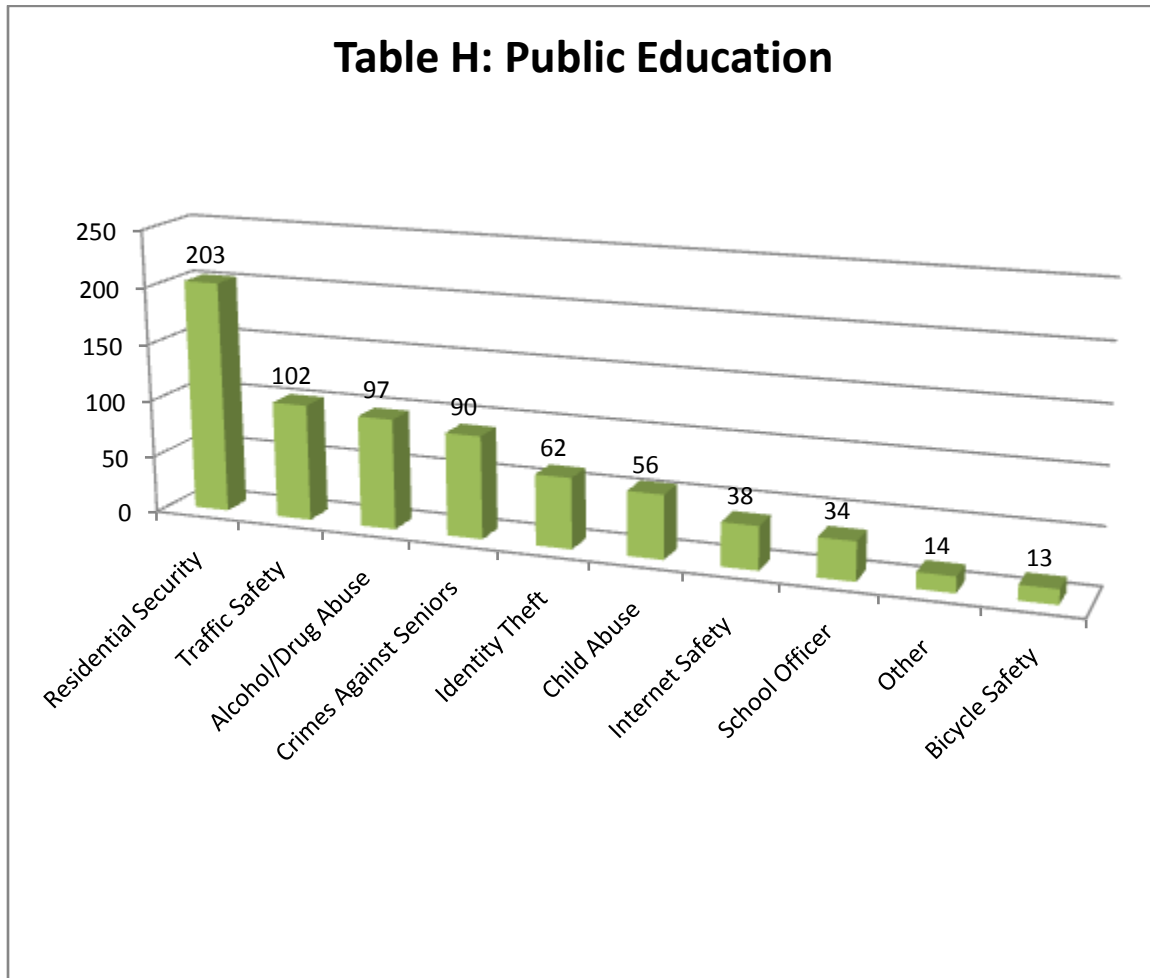
Question 12 was of particular interest as it gauged whether residents feel that traffic enforcement in town is too strict, not strict enough, or about what it should be. Historically the department has received a steady wave of complaints from residents about speeders and other traffic problems. These complaints have been followed with requests for more traffic enforcement.

Returns showed that a majority of residents (58.6%) believed that traffic enforcement was now about what it should be. Only 20% believed that traffic enforcement was not strict enough. While difficult to prove without prior survey data, it seems more than coincidental that 18 months after the establishment of the Traffic Safety Unit the perception of traffic enforcement appears to have shifted from not enough enforcement to adequate enforcement.



Questions 13-15: Police Information Campaigns and Program Importance

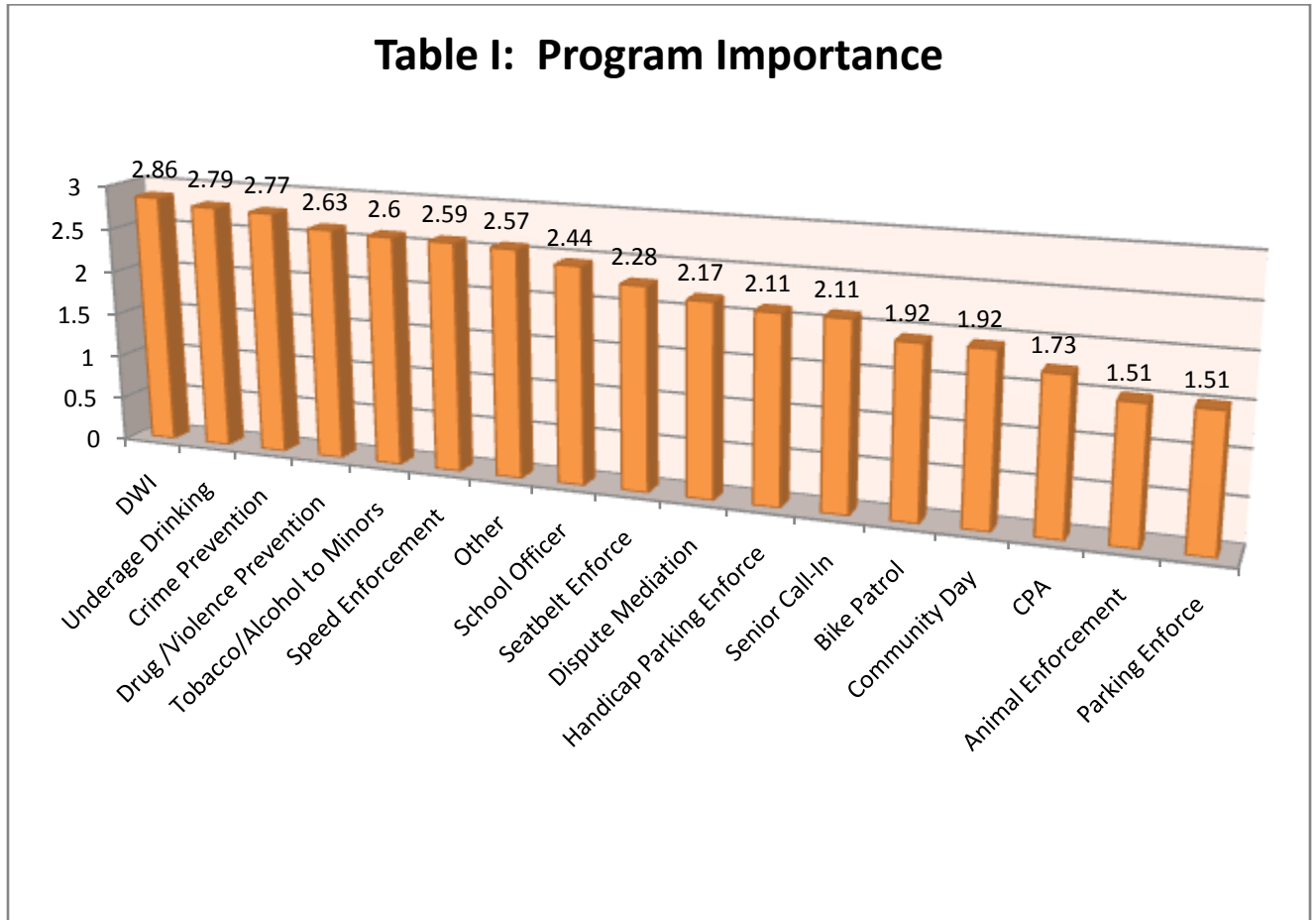
Question 13 asked respondents to select two of the listed public education/information areas which they felt the department should emphasize over the next year. Not all respondents made two selections as the final numbers showed 711 individual selections. The selections are detailed in Table H.



The numbers clearly show that residential security and traffic safety make up the majority of selections accounting for 43% of all selections made over the 10 categories. The fact that over 70% of the respondents were 50 years of age or older may well explain why issues such as residential security (in light of the active adult community burglaries) and school safety officer (most respondents did not have school age children) were selected as they were.

Question 14 asked respondents to indicate the level of importance of 16 police department programs as either highly important, of medium importance, or of low importance.

For the purpose of data collection and collation, a vote of high importance was assigned a numerical value of 3, medium importance 2, and low importance 1. By quantifying the responses with a numerical corollary we were able to come up with an average importance. These results are detailed in Table I.



Individual surveys showed a great range between programs which were believed to be highly important and those felt to be of little importance. When all of the survey results are averaged together, however, personal preferences were quickly counterbalanced resulting in a more homogeneous result.

DWI and underage drinking enforcement received the highest average importance rating, while animal and parking enforcement received the lowest.

Demographic Data

The following tables (J-N) catalog the demographics of the survey respondents. Percentages are based upon those who completed this optional portion of the survey.

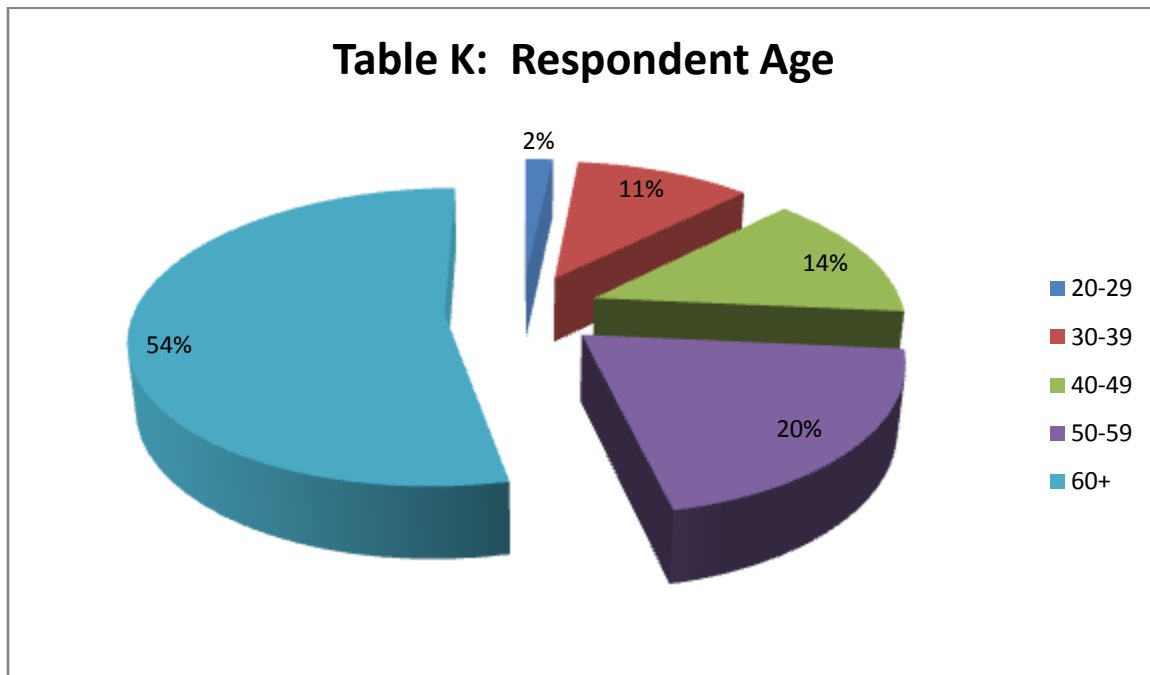
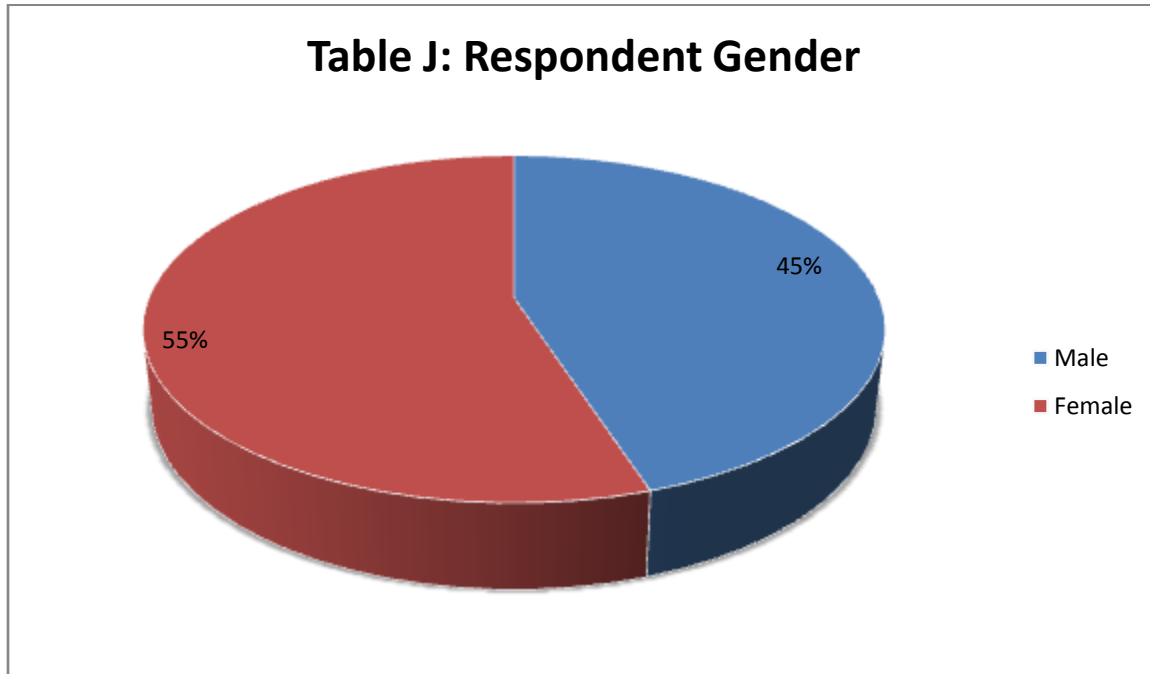


Table L: Geographic Area of Respondents

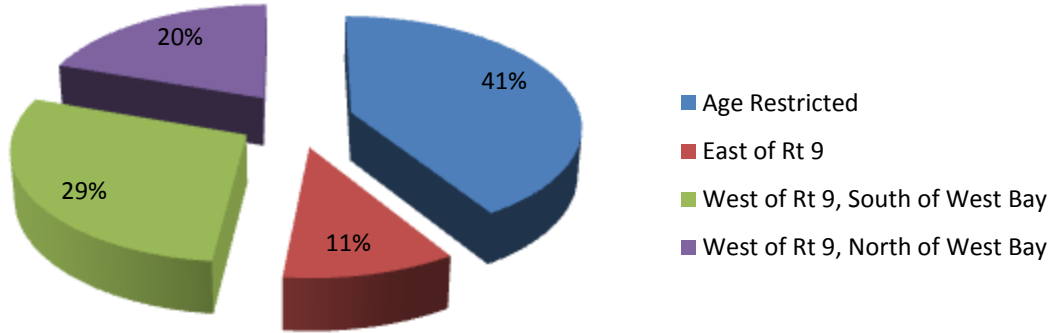
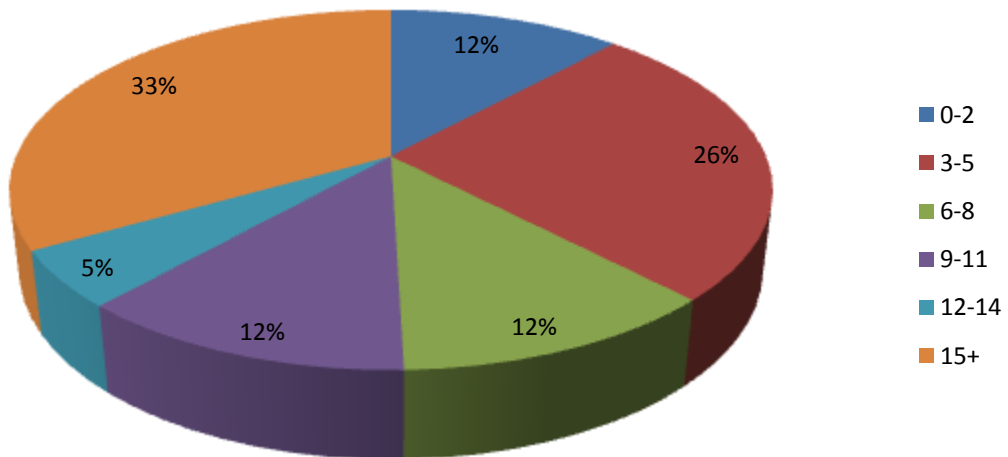
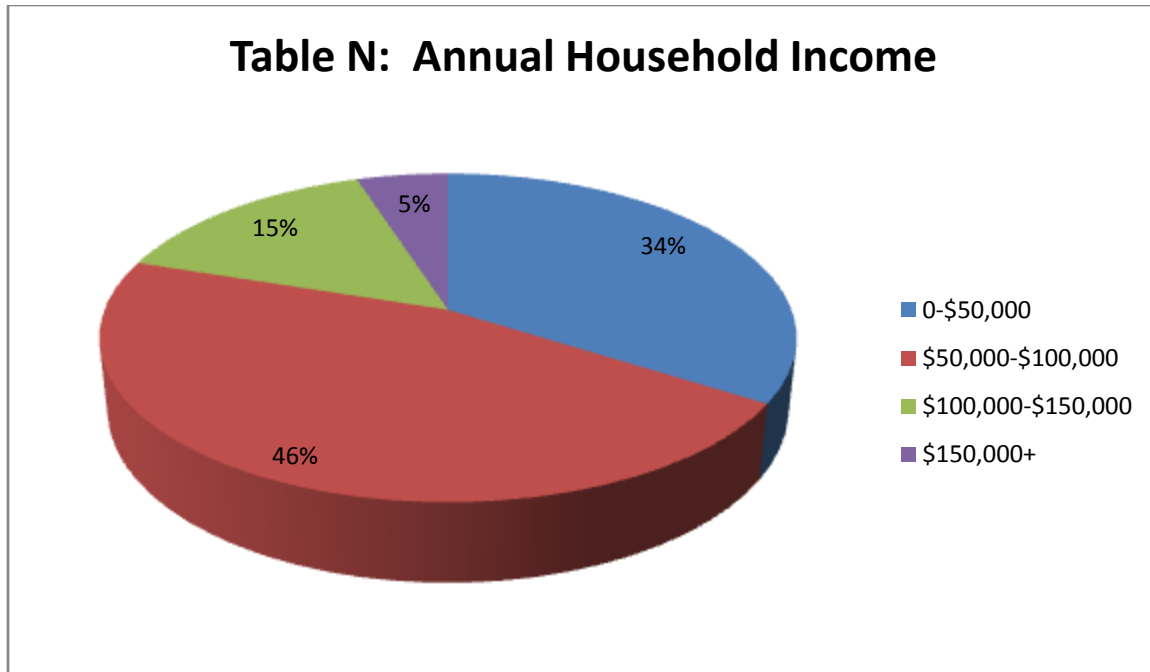


Table M: Length of Time as Resident in Years





Conclusion

This inaugural survey has met all of the objectives identified during the project planning stage. The department has received valuable information concerning the perception of the performance of the various components of the agency. We have further identified the program areas deemed important by the respondents as well as areas where the respondents would like to see the department concentrate efforts and resources.

Future goals for the 2010 survey will include increasing returns from a broader cross-section of the population as well as analyzing the statistical trends with relation to this survey.