



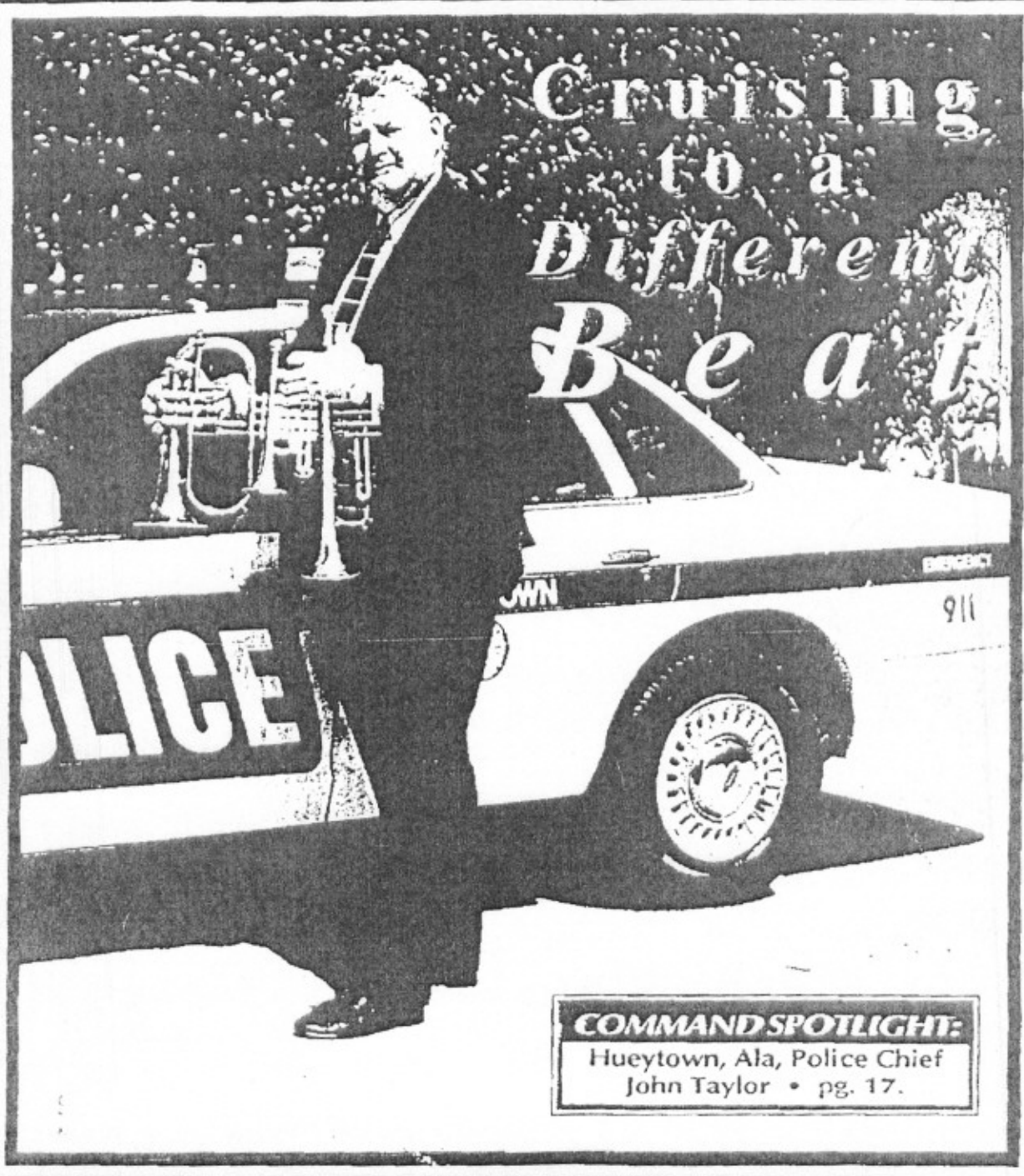
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COMMAND SPOTLIGHT:

Hueytown, Ala, Police Chief
John Taylor • pg. 17.

TRAUMA INTERVENTION PROGRAM EASES POLICE LOAD



"We just had a baby drown in a bathtub", says

Sgt. Phil Morris of Marysville, California. "We had three T.I.P. volunteers on the job: one in the house with the family, one at the hospital with the family there, one at the officer's debriefing. T.I.P. volunteers take care of the family, which frees you up to take your time on the crime scene."

T.I.P. is the Trauma Intervention Program, which began in San Diego 10 years ago, and has since expanded to 57 cities across the country. T.I.P. volunteers give emotional and practical aid to victims and victims' families, relieving police and rescue workers from both the need to provide emotional care and guilt over not having the time to provide it.

"Police officers perceive they have limited time to problem solve," says Lt. Steve Scarano of Oceanside, CA, the first police department to work with T.I.P. "They don't necessarily have the ability or the training to be emotional supporters, but they're imbued with the mission to help. If they know T.I.P. is doing a good job, they feel they're doing a good job."

T.I.P.'s founder, Wayne Forton, says Scarano's support was vital to getting the original program up and running. Whenever T.I.P. considers opening a new chapter, one of the questions they have to answer is whether there's a police or emergency official who'll work with them to set the chapter up.

Forton saw the need for T.I.P. while working as a mental health counselor in San Diego. Parents who'd lost children, seniors mourning their late spouse, would come in filled with guilt, anger or depression because of events following the death. "If things get all screwed up in that first hour or two," Forton says, "the person is haunted by that for the rest of their life. We can't do anything about the tragedy, but we can make things go right afterwards, so they have no added regrets."

He offers an example: an elderly couple visiting a friend in San Diego woke one morning to find their friend had died in the night. The couple knew no one else in the city, so police called a

T.I.P. volunteer who stayed the night, and helped the grieving couple provide police and morticians with necessary information. She also provided practical aid.

With victims and families taken care of, officers are free to concentrate on the crime scene, then move on to the next call. "You feel really bad, leaving a traumatized victim," says Capt. Scott Brady of Yuba City, CA. "T.I.P. allows you peace of mind, knowing someone's staying with the victim."

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such as stopping a bathroom leak, eliminating a fire hazard and taking the dead man's cats to a shelter — all things the couple were too numb to attend to.

T.I.P. volunteers are also trained to watch for little details police may not have the time to think of: that a widow has a chance to say goodbye to her late husband, that kids don't accidentally walk in on their father's corpse.

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T.I.P. volunteers also help their charges cope with police and medical personnel, explaining police procedure, hospital policy, and why investigations take longer than the victim thinks they should.

It's the cop on the scene (or the firefighter or paramedic) who decides to call T.I.P. or not; if they do, the T.I.P. dispatcher sends a volunteer out immediately. Nationwide, T.I.P. receives around 500 calls a

month, mostly for people with no other source of support: tourists, new arrivals in town, seniors.

"Although we don't define ourselves as a senior program" Forton says, "our typical call is an older person waking up in the morning and finding their spouse has died. Probably 80 percent of our calls involve seniors."

T.I.P.'s volunteer staff have to undergo 55 hours of tutoring, training and practice before going out on call. They're taught what to say (and not say) to their charges, how to help people get back on their feet, how to work with police, firefighters and paramedics efficiently, and how to keep themselves safe in dangerous situations or neighborhoods.



After completing a call, T.I.P. solicits feedback on volunteer performance from the officer who asked for them. "They do it after every call," says Captain Morris. "Within two or three

weeks after the incident, you get a card in the mail. They ask how many volunteers showed, what they did, and how they assisted you."

"We look at call volume," Forton says, "If responders aren't using the program it's not successful. We also evaluate the cards — are they saying we were very helpful, somewhat helpful? Did we provide a service? Are they saying we saved them time, reduced their stress? Did we free them from the scene to get back in service?"

Anyone who'd like more information about T.I.P. can call Wayne Forton at (619) 967-2239. Forton says starting a new chapter requires support from local police and firefighters, and a volunteer in the area to head up the chapter. They also require funds for postage, insurance and office expenses; different chapters have raised funds through bake sales, corporate donations or contributions from police.

"Do it," Berry says. "It fills a great void for law enforcement, firefighters and hospitals. I think it's a service like a missionary — I think they're doing God's work." ❀

TRAUMA INTERVENTION PROGRAM