

On the Job

From streakers to snowstorms to bomb threats, campus police see it all. And in the post-9/11 age, they have more responsibilities than ever.

By Sharon Tregaskis

It's noon on the Friday before spring break—Dragon Day—and temperatures are well below freezing; there's a winter storm warning in effect and snow has been falling steadily for hours. In Rand Hall, costumed freshman architects—Pac-Man and a blue ghost, a hirsute girl gorilla with a ponytail, a nearly naked Cupid clad in a diaper and sneakers with a diminutive set of wings strapped to his back—make last-minute preparations for the parade. Meanwhile, in a small lecture room in Barton Hall, Sergeant Jeffrey Montesano and Lieutenant Robert MacHenry brief thirty Cornell Police officers and a quartet of auxiliary members in orange raincoats. Montesano—who has represented CUPD in myriad planning meetings over the last few months with the student architects, their advisors, and staff from Risk Management and Environmental Health and Safety—has drawn the parade route on a dry-erase board at the front of the room and diagrammed the dragon (a non-descript worm in green marker) with CUPD assignments indicated at its head and tail and along its flanks. A cart mounted with a papier-mâché head will precede the dragon on its route. “It’s a buggy thing made of bamboo,” he says of the cart, “and its legs move.”

MacHenry highlights a choke point on the parade route near Uris and Olin libraries (“a hotspot for altercations”) and Montesano offers a warning about the burn site where the parade ends. Normally, spray paint marks the dragon’s final resting place and indicates a safe distance from the fire, the sergeant explains. This year’s heavy snow necessitated more obvious markers: three-foot stakes have been strung with red tape for the interior perimeter, while a ring of yellow tape defines an outer one. “Keep an eye on those stakes,” he cautions. An officer asks whether the engineers have built a phoenix to battle the dragon, but Montesano says no one’s heard anything. Briefing concluded, MacHenry offers a benediction. “Dragon Day seems to have toned down, but don’t get complacent—and watch each other’s backs,” says the twenty-five-year CUPD veteran. “Keep it good, keep it happy, keep it safe.”

Campus police have long juggled a bizarre roster of responsibilities—catching streakers and underage drinkers, protecting visiting dignitaries and rock stars, directing traffic and managing crowds at commencement and student protests, tracking down lost laptops and fraternity pranksters. Cornell’s forty-four officers monitor the security of animal research labs at the Vet college, police Slope Day, and issue citations for tray sliding. (They call it “Toboggan Patrol.”) Dispatchers log about 100,000 calls annually on the University’s emergency line—911 from any campus phone—for everything from a sick student who needs transportation to the local hospital to late-night complaints about a tripped breaker in a dorm to inquiries from worried parents who can’t reach their kids. A city police department might not field such calls, notes MacHenry, but

Keeping the peace: CUPD Captain Kathy Zoner on the scene at Dragon Day '07.



JASON KOSKI / UP

“there’s a different expectation of what campus police do. We won’t turn anyone away.” And these days, CUPD’s list of responsibilities has grown even longer and more complex. On top of policing routine infractions and dealing with quality-of-life issues, officers assess potential terrorist targets. They provide training and backup to sister law enforcement agencies, including the only bomb-sniffing dog in Tompkins County, and prepare for a wide variety of disasters.

In the wake of the mid-April shootings at Virginia Tech, concerns about campus security—and the vital role that university police play in protecting faculty, staff, and students—have never seemed more pressing. At Cornell, much of the day-to-day work boils down to stopping crime before it starts—not only providing guidance during event planning, as Montesano did with the architects, but maintaining a visible presence on campus. Seven officers patrol on bikes throughout the spring, summer, and fall; during big party times at the beginning and end of the school year, CUPD partners with the Ithaca Police Department for foot patrols in Collegetown.

A two-man crime prevention unit offers education for the campus community on such topics as winter driving skills and identity theft. In the first six months of the 2006–07 school year, nearly 9,000 people participated in 106 programs run by officers George Sutfin and Ray Price, each a thirty-year veteran. This year’s largest was the Party at Helen’s, an alcohol awareness event at Helen Newman Hall during freshman orientation. New students played basketball and bowled, worked out in the gym, drank non-alcoholic mocktails, and experimented with glasses—nicknamed “beer goggles”—that mimic the effects of intoxication on vision. “We have them do the tests they’d take if they’d been pulled over,” says Price. Another program educates fraternities and sororities on how to throw parties that won’t get them busted for underage drinking, noise violations, or other infractions.

Shura Gat, a second-degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do, co-teaches the unit’s personal safety program with Sutfin. A tall, slim thirty-seven-year-old, Gat not only coaches participants on such physical skills as grabbing an attacker’s throat but emphasizes more esoteric elements of self-defense. “I cover awareness, intuition, how you carry yourself, raising your voice, setting and defending your personal boundaries,” says Gat, who has trained sororities, residence hall groups, and undergrads headed for study abroad. At the invitation of Cornell’s director of building care, this January she created a six-hour program for 100 custodians who start work in the pre-dawn hours, often alone in vacant buildings.

On Valentine’s Day, as a blizzard blanketed the county, Sergeant Charles Howard patrolled in an unmarked black Ford Explorer. As a shift supervisor, he drove a discretionary route covering the entire campus—from CUPD’s Barton Hall headquarters up around the Ag Quad, through Forest Home to north campus, back across the gorge, through central campus, back up to the Vet college, and out to the fleet garage to inspect a damaged patrol car. Most of the county had been shut down by a snow emergency that would ultimately dump seventeen inches on Ithaca and close the University for about eighteen hours. Calls were light and the ser-

geant expected to log close to his average of twenty miles per shift.

In the nearly three decades he’s been on the job, Howard has seen the addition and replacement of dozens of buildings across campus, plummeting attendance at football games—once the only time the entire force was expected to report for duty—and an increase in the drinking age from eighteen to twenty-one, closing campus bars and driving much of the alcohol-related crime into Collegetown, where the IPD has jurisdiction. And compared to his first years on duty, says Howard, today’s campus protestors are “pussycats.”

But perhaps one of the biggest changes has come in the growing awareness of institutional threats that have little to do with students. “9/11 caused the University to assess its vulnerability to attack, but also raised its awareness to the raw materials here,” says the officer, alluding to the destructive potential of lab contents across campus, as well as the security of Cornell’s water treatment plant and the co-generation facility that produces heat and electricity. “We’re more vigilant now, looking at ways to reduce risk.”

Much of that vigilance comes in the form of scenario development, says Chief Curtis Ostrander, who trained at the FBI Academy and put in twenty years with the IPD before coming to Cornell. “What would we do ‘if?’” he asks. “This is the game we play in law enforcement all the time, and the University has to do that, too.” Insights come from reports of challenges faced by other colleges and universities, from training with federal law enforcement officials, and from debriefings after events on campus. “We’re not here to scare people, but we’re constantly striving to learn what threats are on-campus and what threats are off-campus that could come on campus,” says Ostrander, who co-authored *Crime at College: The Student Guide to Personal Safety*. “We look at these things on a daily basis. Sometimes it’s through training. Sometimes it’s reading a newspaper article.”

Catastrophes like 9/11 and Katrina revealed at least one respect in which CUPD was ahead of the curve—collaboration with other law enforcement agencies. “When I came here, I was genuinely surprised at how well the agencies got along,” says Ithaca Police Chief Lauren Signer, who joined the force in 1999. “I’ve learned that that’s out of necessity. When something bad happens, we have to work together. Otherwise, the next wave of help for us, from the minute we put in a phone call, is three hours away.”

In May 2005, when the local Wal-Mart reported what appeared to be a pipe bomb in the parking lot, Signer called Ostrander, who had CUPD officers secure the lot and control traffic on the nearby four-lane highway, and sent along Sabre, a seven-year-old black Lab who joined the force in June 2001 as an explosive-detection dog. “We backfill and move in and out for each other,” says Signer. “We do it frequently, we get along, and we’re not like, ‘Don’t you dare drive your Cornell police car in my city.’” At Wal-Mart, IPD officers disabled the device by firing at it with a shotgun, per FBI protocol, while Sabre and his handler, Sergeant Montesano, swept the area for secondary devices.

Sabre and Montesano also travel frequently to local schools to investigate bomb threats and do advance security checks at event venues and the airport when high-profile visitors come to town. “We’re part of the community,” says Ostrander, “so we share, and he goes around a lot of places.” In September 2006, when Sabre sniffed the stage slated for President Skorton’s inaugural speech on the Arts Quad, the dog indicated the presence of explosives—and visual inspection revealed some unfamiliar structures. “We



On the beat: Officers David Honan (left) and Steve Shirley keep an eye on the Slope Day crowd.



CUPD Chief Curtis Ostrander

cleared everybody out and then did a bit of research, which is part of the protocol,” says CUPD Captain Kathy Zoner. “It turns out the stage had been used for a rock concert with pyrotechnics. There was explosive residue there, and the dog did his job.”

back when the University launched its police force, life was simpler. The Safety Division was founded in 1931 under the New York State Education Law, the staff comprising two patrolmen on horseback. By 1937, the student body numbered 5,500, and staffing had expanded to three mounted patrolmen sharing one car among them. In lieu of radios, a system of red lights topped the taller buildings; a flashing bulb signaled trouble and alerted the patrolman on duty to call the University operator for details. By 1966, the daytime population on campus was close to 20,000, and the Safety Division staff included seventeen patrolmen, two detectives, and twenty-one auxiliary officers using five radio-equipped cars and two motor-scooters, as well as thirty-five night watchmen on foot patrol—each walking fourteen to sixteen miles a shift. Everyone got a walkie-talkie, but much of the traf-

fic control was still handled by officers stationed at intersections, equipped with a whistle and a hearty set of lungs. “Sometimes the traffic is moving along nice and smooth, and then six students start to jaywalk,” Patrolman Frederick Rosica told the *Alumni News* in 1966. “Well, I yell and you can hear me for two blocks.”

New hires in Rosica’s time received on-the-job training, and some enrolled for courses in police work at a local community college, but prior law enforcement experience wasn’t a significant consideration. When Sergeant Chuck Howard joined the force in March 1969, his supervisor handed him keys to a patrol car, a radio, and a map. (Granted, Howard had completed some basic police training and spent eighteen months on the Ithaca College security detail.) This year’s hires include a former NYPD patrol officer with an associate’s degree in criminal justice and six months of police academy training. He’ll get an additional sixteen to eighteen weeks of training with veteran members of the Cornell force before he goes solo, and by the time his probationary period ends, he’ll have earned his bachelor’s degree. It’s a far cry from Howard’s early days on the force. “Police school was a very new concept,” says the sergeant. “No one on days wore guns except the officers doing the bank run—there was no armored car service to collect cash on campus. Just us.”

After the Willard Straight Hall takeover in April 1969 and that year’s spate of burglaries, arsons, and protests, the force expanded to include forty-seven patrolmen, three more than the current CUPD roster. Funding was increased for campus lighting and each officer was issued a gun. Today’s force carries 150-megahertz



Ithaca Police Chief Lauren Signer

radios, handcuffs, pepper spray, and batons, as well as Glock semi-automatics. (MacHenry says the last time he fired his weapon outside a training session was in the early Eighties, when he put a deer out of its misery after it was struck by a car near Lynah Rink.) Unlike the UCLA force, which made headlines in November when officers on a late-night security detail electrocuted an Iranian-American undergraduate in the library, CUPD doesn't issue Tasers. "There are a lot of tools available to us," says Zoner. "We like to use the least intrusive method."

The alcohol-fueled celebrations that mark Senior Week—the period between the end of exams and graduation—have been decidedly more low-key in recent years. The turning point, says IPD chief Signer, was a particularly bad run a few years back that culminated when a drunk student fell from a Collegetown balcony and undergrads pelted the assisting firefighters with beer bottles. "I said, 'We're just not having that,'" recalls Signer, who brought together representatives from Cornell, Ithaca College, and the city. "We all sat down and said, 'How are we going to work on this? What can each of us do?'" Among the solutions was a collaboration that pairs IPD and CUPD officers for joint patrols of Collegetown and the adjoining areas of campus in late May and late August, just before classes resume. "The officer who's in their own jurisdiction is the lead, and the second officer is there to help," says Signer. "It's as if we're one big police department because we have the same goals."

CUPD officers agree. "Students used to take over the streets. There were fights. It was out of control," says David Honan, who was shift supervisor the Tuesday night after exams ended in May 2006. "At its worst, to gain control we had to make arrests, be very physical. Now people are pretty cooperative and do what we ask—get out of the street, disperse a large party." On that evening in May, he spent the early part of the shift providing backup for an officer who stopped a driver for failure to signal on a road near campus, discovered she was intoxicated and had a suspended license, and issued a ticket for DWI. "A lot of people we deal with have nothing to do with Cornell," says Honan, waiting for a tow truck to take away the young woman's battered SUV. "They're locals who come through just because of the University's location."

DWI resolved, Honan put in a couple more hours on general patrol, and as 1 a.m. approached he headed for Collegetown, where the bars were closing—historically the time when revelry spilled into the streets and fights erupted. Pairs of IPD and CUPD officers were stationed at each corner and along College Avenue. Honan strolled the block, keeping an eye on the situation. "As of right now," he said, "this is my quietest Senior Week ever."

ike Senior Week, Dragon Day 2007 is shaping up to be a relatively subdued event. At Ho Plaza, a dozen landscape architecture students mount a weak defense against the dragon, but no phoenix has appeared and the chief visibly relaxes. There's still the bottleneck at the libraries and the burning itself to get through, but things are going well. Moments later, Ostrander confiscates a tire after a student dressed as Mr. Goodwrench rolls it through the parade. As "Puff the Magic Dragon" plays on the Libe Tower chimes, Mr. Goodwrench protests that the tire is part of his costume, but Ostrander isn't negotiating; the student relents and fades back into the crowd.

At the burn site, a recently promoted Lieutenant Honan has

deployed a dozen officers in preparation for the crowd's arrival. "When I first started, there was no safety equipment," says Honan, who joined the force in 1995. "Officers got hit with water balloons, paint. One year, an officer was knocked out with an ice-ball and had to be transported to the hospital." The missiles may have been poorly aimed assaults on the dragon, not intentional attacks on the officers, but he seems relieved that such episodes have become a thing of the past. In comparison, says the lieutenant, this year is a breeze.

Then the crowd arrives. There's a flurry of activity as students discard their costumes at the base of the dragon and it's lit on fire. At 1:45, Environmental Health and Safety staff aims fire extinguishers at the pyre, and within minutes the crowds have dispersed. There haven't been any arrests; of the three calls CUPD

received, one was about a sprained ankle early in the parade, and the remaining two concerned Cupid, apparently on the fast-track for alcohol poisoning and hypothermia. Patrol officer Denise Schulze tells Honan that the student is of legal age, insisting he's fine and still oriented to "time, place, and person," shorthand for the threshold that determines when police can transport an individual to the hospital against his or her will. Schulze says he's still cavorting in the snow, and she'll keep an eye on him. By the time the officers have been dismissed, Cupid's friends have taken him home to warm up and rehydrate, and Honan declares the day a "great success." ●

Despite fifteen years on the Cornell campus, contributing editor SHARON TREGASKIS '95 has yet to run afoul of CUPD.

In Case of Emergency

CUPD plans for the worst



At the west end of Barton Hall, below the indoor track and bleachers, winds a maze of hallways punctuated by locked metal doors—the Cornell University Police Department's headquarters. Behind one of the doors, a storage facility has been carved from what was once the Army ROTC's indoor rifle range, where the cinderblocks lining the far wall still bear the scars of long-ago bullets. Inside, next to the K-9 dog's kennel and a half-dozen riot shields—so far, used only in training—metal shelves reach nearly to the fifteen-foot ceiling. Boxes of gas masks and filters crowd the top shelf. Closer to eye level, a dozen bright red forty-gallon Rubbermaid bins contain the information and tools needed for Cornell's administrators to respond to a disaster.

In the event of an emergency, officers would retrieve these bins, each labeled for a critical unit on campus—Gannett Health Center, Environmental Health and Safety, Risk Management, Human Resources, and Information Technology, among others—and haul them into a nearby conference room, converting it into the University's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). Representatives from each unit would arrive to coordinate the response, relying on power from a generator and the contents of their bins: telephones, maps, printouts of policies, laptops with backup files.

As the public has become more aware of the challenges posed by natural and man-made disasters—the school shootings at Columbine and Virginia Tech, NYU's upheaval in the

weeks after the World Trade Center collapsed, the disruption of myriad Gulf Coast schools in the wake of Katrina—campus police and administrators have acquired a host of new responsibilities. The biggest challenge, they say, is finding a balance between preparing for every eventuality and retaining the flexibility to respond to the unexpected while maintaining everyday security and safety. "There's a continuum from 'I'll deal with it when it hits,' to the idea of analysis paralysis, where you can't actually get anything finalized," says Rich McDaniel, MPA '75, MBA '78, vice president for business services and environmental safety, who provides broad oversight for many of Cornell's emergency-planning efforts. Ask CUPD how they'll respond to a hypothetical evacuation or shutdown, and the challenges of negotiating that continuum come into stark relief. "We don't have a static plan because we never know what the situation is going to be or how it will evolve," says Chief Curtis Ostrander. "It's up to us to pretty quickly put together a program to determine how we're going to do it."

The EOC was partially activated in 2001, when anthrax contaminated mail nationwide, and during the Northeast blackouts of 2003. But recently, the bins have come out of storage only for annual inspection and training. A backup facility near the Orchards would be activated if Barton Hall were unavailable, and in the event that a more remote location were required, Ithaca administrators have begun discussing reciprocity arrangements with their colleagues at Weill Cornell in New York City.

But the largest ongoing effort in campus preparedness has nothing to do with bombs, guns, or natural disasters. It's planning for a pandemic caused by avian influenza, expected to kill more than half of those infected—including previously healthy children and young adults. "It's such a big emergency, should it ever occur, that if you flowed unthinkingly into it, you would be at a serious disadvantage," says McDaniel, who co-chairs the Pandemic Flu Steering Committee, formed last spring and set to deliver its recommendations to President Skorton early this summer. In February, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, along with the Department of Education and other federal agencies, released a comprehensive report on "social distancing strategies"—essentially, quarantine-like measures that reduce person-to-person contact and slow transmission of the disease—as a first line of defense to contain a virulent bug for which no vaccine exists and effective treatment has yet to be developed.

Already, says McDaniel, hundreds of Cornell employees have invested several thousand hours in figuring out how the University would handle such a quasi-quarantine. If the pandemic struck mid-semester, classes would be cancelled and healthy students sent home. In the event that scientists devise a vaccine, Barton Hall would likely serve as a primary mass-inoculation site for Tompkins County and campus police would help maintain order. "We'll have property to protect, in terms of the vaccinations and medical sup-

plies," says Captain Kathy Zoner. "We'll have people to protect—not only those housed on campus who are presumably well and healthy, but those coming to campus who may not be inclined to follow the county directive for showing up, getting in line, and waiting."

Still, uncertainty remains: How quickly will the virus progress and how long will it take to reach Ithaca? How much vaccine will be available and will the campus have to fend for itself or collaborate with outside agencies? The steering committee has analyzed University policies that would have to be implemented or revised, determined what supplies would be needed, and considered how to scale down in the face of inadequate human resources. "If you've thought all that through in advance and everybody understands, it's like a pit crew at the Indianapolis 500," says McDaniel. "When the car comes in, everybody knows their role, swings into action, and does what they need to do."

When this year's Valentine's Day blizzard hit, University officials learned what happens when that crew misfires. University administrators held multiple phone conferences throughout the previous night to assess weather forecasts and determine how to respond. They decided to open, but by 10 a.m. wind patterns had shifted and road crews couldn't clear the snow fast enough. Soon after, Executive Vice President Steve Golding decided to shut down the University, canceling classes and activities and sending non-essential employees home. "If you're making a decision to close in the middle of the day, there's never a whole lot of time," says McDaniel, "and there were logistical nuances." Chief among them: confusion about policies and slow dissemination of information. (An e-mail announcement of the 12:30 closure, urging those relying on public transportation to reach their bus stops by 12:45, hit e-mail in-boxes at 12:40.) Staff and faculty were sufficiently aggravated by how the situation was handled that close to 1,500 signed an online petition the next day, calling for administrators to re-examine University practices regarding weather-related closures.

CUPD had full staffing throughout the storm; if necessary, Ostrander notes, he could have billeted his officers at the Statler, in spare dorm rooms, or even on the fold-out couch in his office. Patrols turned out not to be too difficult, he says, in part because the department now has six SUVs, each with four-wheel drive—a direct result of the 1993 blizzard that shut down highways throughout the Northeast and revealed that CUPD's Crown Victoria sedans were no match for steep, slushy campus roads.

Ultimately, says McDaniel, no matter how well you plan, any emergency response has to include strategies for incorporating new information, updating decisions, and disseminating that information—and organizations the size of Cornell don't turn on a dime. "Compared to other universities, we're probably further along—in the top quartile in terms of preparedness—but we're not done," he says. "It's a continuum where, as each month goes by, you increase your level of readiness."