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Tourism District commander seeks collaboration to improve Atlantic City as a whole, not just district

By LYNDA COHEN Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, October 20, 2011 1:00 am

Tom Gilbert's title may be commander, but his vision for making Atlantic City "clean and safe" is all about partnerships.

"I think everybody in the city has a stake in the future of Atlantic City," the Tourism District commander said. "What I've found since I've been here is a real depth of talent and commitment that transcends both the public and private sectors. We're going to continue to build those relationships."

He will speak with the Greater Atlantic City Chamber on Thursday as part of his outreach to work with various entities within the city. That goal also is behind an effort led by Atlantic County Prosecutor Ted Housel to map all the cameras within the city to help with investigations.

Law-enforcement leaders hope "Eyes on Atlantic City" eventually will have cameras that will hook up to a planned updated computer system. On Tuesday, the city took bids for a gunshot-detection system, which involves video cameras that move toward the sound of gunshots.

"Much of what we're trying to work on is to bring (police) an expanded law-enforcement toolbox," Gilbert said. "There are a number of law-enforcement programs in place right now within the city, some of which can't be shared publicly due to ongoing operations."

But some things he could discuss Wednesday included the TIDES program, or Targeting, Intelligence and Directed Enforcement Strategies, which allows the sharing of information and strategies among agencies such as the Atlantic City Police Department, Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office, State Police and the Attorney General's Office.

While he avoided commenting on the number of officers from other agencies working within the city, he said the "good collective presence" includes county, state and federal authorities.

On Monday, state Attorney General Paula Dow was in the city for a roundtable discussion that brought together about 50 members of public safety, including Housel and Deputy Chiefs Ernest Jubilee and Henry White, along with representatives from the state Division of Gaming Enforcement.

"At this point, the collaboration has been seamless," Gilbert said. "We seem to be looking at things and arriving at the same conclusions."

Gilbert spent Wednesday at several places in the city.

First, there was the Texas Avenue playground, where increased graffiti has him worried about the children playing there.

There was the Boardwalk Apartments — the scene of a recent homicide — which Gilbert was proud to say a group effort led by the city is helping demolish.

His stops also included Stanley Holmes, Back Maryland and Brown's Park, where he would like to see the area named for a fallen local World War II soldier reflect that honor.

They fall mostly outside the Tourism District. But, as Gilbert, Jubilee and White have stressed, the city's policing pays no attention to the district's borders.

"In my capacity, I'm able to have awareness of a number of things that are ongoing and am very confident that they do not get slowed down or obstructed by any geographical or jurisdictional boundaries," Gilbert said.

Gilbert is now retired from his three decades with the State Police, but he remains a sworn law enforcement officer.

He drives an unmarked police vehicle, has a police radio and can carry a weapon.

"I think (being an officer) allows me to be more productive in my duties," Gilbert said. "In putting a public-safety plan together, it's important to be fully cognizant of all aspects of law-enforcement activities within the city and how they complement and support each other."

That's also why he agrees Jubilee — and not Mayor Lorenzo Langford — should make decisions such as whether casino garages should be included in police patrols. Langford recently filed suit against Housel for negating the mayor's directive that the patrols stop.

Discussions also have included instituting a system similar to the state's Regional Operations Intelligence Center, which allows one place for all public-safety entities to share information, including everything from weather to terrorism threats.

The city department leaders also are moving along in putting police substations in the troubled neighborhoods of Stanley Holmes Village and Back Maryland. The one in Stanley Holmes is "very close" to fruition, Gilbert said.

There are also plans for Class 2 officers — who work limited times on an hourly basis — that would complement the current ranks.

"I've been out to many areas of the city side by side with Atlantic City police officers, seeing them interact with the residents," Gilbert said. "I've been very impressed with their knowledge of the city, their understanding of public-safety challenges and their competency."

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