The View of the Executive Director

Civilian oversight of law enforcement in a major urban area can be as challenging as it is rewarding. But it would be impossible for it to function effectively without reaching out and developing solid working relationships.

This issue is dedicated to all our citizens, community partners, volunteers, institutions, elected and appointed officials who helped to make 2015 the most impactful year in the agency’s history. Your support, feedback and collaboration has significantly improved and expanded our delivery of services and exposed more residents to our mission and what we do everyday.

We highlight in this edition some of the many contributions that you have made to ACRB and feature some of the things we accomplished together.

We plan to continue reaching out to our community for volunteers and contribute whatever we can at meetings, rallies, festivals, block parties and our KNOW YOUR RIGHTS training workshops.

When we come together as responsible citizens and diligently monitor activities where we live, work and play, rampant illegal activity on our streets is held in check and those who are sworn to protect us are held accountable.

Always remember, if you ever have a question about the agency and/or a complaint about an Atlanta police or corrections officers’ action, contact the ACRB at 404-865-8622. Email us at acrb@atlantaga.gov. Visit our website at www.acrbgov.org. The Atlanta Citizen Review Board is here to serve you!

Lambda Nu Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. at G.S.U. Volunteers for ACRB

September 9, 2015 was a milestone moment in the history of the ACRB. It was on that date that the Lambda Nu Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. at Georgia State University began bringing its members to the agency’s office at Atlanta City Hall to be trained under the ACRB’s Community Outreach Volunteer Ambassador Program (COVAP).

The sorority, which has a reputation for community service, has made a commitment to deploy its volunteers on campus and throughout the city on behalf of ACRB on a regular basis. Already the ladies played a major role for the agency at the 7th Annual Festival of Lights Parade and Community Exhibition in Atlanta’s historic English Avenue Community.

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Executive Director Lee Reid welcomes Lambda Nu Parliamentarian Brianna Wells, Zeta Phi Beta’s first trainee, during her COVAP Training at ACRB’s Atlanta City Hall offices.
M.E.N.S. WEAR INC. (Making Employment the Next Step) sells suits at drastically low prices to men looking for work, then teaches them how to present themselves during a job interview.

In partnership with the Walter and Andrew Young Family YMCA, ACRB and others, M.E.N.S. WEAR INC. presented “Image of a Man Understanding the Power in You”. It featured an urban wear fashion show, “Re-Invent The Gent”, a stage play, “The Man in the Suit” by Tommy Youngblood from the YMCA and an ACRB KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TRAINING WORKSHOP on the Burlington Stage at Greenbriar Mall.

The audience was tested on just how much they knew about what their rights are when encountering law enforcement on the street, at the job, in their car or at home, and rewarded with gift bags.

Greenbriar Mall once again has shown a willingness to present relevant community and cultural events, educate and uplift the customers that it serves.

Students at Atlanta Job Corps Stage a Protest March and Rally for Peace

Hundreds of Atlanta Job Corps students took to the streets in an orderly, well-planned march and rally for peace. They were escorted by Atlanta Police Department motorcycle officers as they made their way along West Lake Avenue NW to the Allen Temple AME Church. They rallied outside Atlanta Job Corps headquarters and staged a successful program that was very impactful.

Featured speakers included

Chris Herro, Regional Director, US Department of Labor; Jarred McKinley from the Office of Congressman John Lewis; Zebron Pledger from the office of Congressman Hank Johnson; Capt. Brian McGee and Officer Santrez Fitten from the Fulton County Sheriff’s Office; Charles Curry from ACRB and many others. Job Corps offers free job training for students ages 16-24.
“...I think of a fiery spirit to give citizens a very loud and strong voice...”

In 2015, few ACRB volunteers and supporters were as dynamic, resourceful, insightful and energetic as the Reverend Benford Dwight Stellmacher. A seasoned soldier of the civil rights movement, members of the underserved community have his phone number on speed dial whenever a crisis happens. He has single-handedly brought the most potential police incident cases to ACRB for consideration.

Although sometimes confined to a wheelchair, Rev. Stellmacher nevertheless displays the stamina of a man half his age, especially when called upon to advocate for the helpless and the poor.

ACRB was honored to have Reverend Stellmacher, with bullhorn in hand, lead our banner in the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Parade this year and look forward to further collaborations with him in the future.

“It’s an organization that came into existence with a fiery spirit to give citizens a very loud and strong voice (for those who) really feel that citizens have been neglected for many years and no resource to deal with those who retaliate on them,” Reverend Stellmacher said.

(continued on page 4)

When Tara Jackson thinks about ACRB, “I think of a gateway for possible mediation between citizens and police.”

Jackson is a devoted mother who is doing all she can to get help for her son. He was traumatized after being tasered in his high school by an Atlanta Police Department (APD) School Resource Officer (SRO) following an encounter with a female student. Jackson notes her son “is no angel,” but that in this case it was an excessive use of force.

“He did not have a weapon, did not pose a threat on the officer. My son was 15 years old. He weighed probably about, maybe 125-35 pounds. Two (SRO) officers at the scene of the incident said a lady spat in his face. One of the officers I know was pretty large and could have used a different method to handle the situation. I just feel that to tase him wasn’t an appropriate measure to take.”

Jackson admits that her son did retaliate, pushed then struck the female student with a blow to the head, “which is unacceptable, she...had already gotten into another issue with another student earlier that day prior to spitting on him, and he avoided her on several occasions.” When they responded to the confrontation, Jackson says her son does not recall SROs demanding them to stop. “He just remembers being tased and hitting his head on the floor.” Jackson was also concerned when told a prong from the taser shot hit another student near her son. (Continued on page 4)

Ron Jerido holds the distinction of being the very first person to appear for ACRB’s Community Outreach Volunteer Ambassador Program (COVAP).

The 56 year old single father of two arrived about a half hour earlier than scheduled for the one hour COVAP training course and expressed an eagerness to get started.

“What got me involved… it was not one thing (but) many things...too many people having bad encounters with police. Growing up I was told how to handle certain situations. Maybe my experience in the world could have saved a life. There are so many people going to jail and in the prison pipeline. While we can’t save the world, we can save one here and there. My youngest is 21. We’ve had many of these conversations. We’re trying to share with others because a lot of them don’t have male figures in their lives except for the people they meet on the streets.”

Jerido was also first to volunteer with ACRB for the annual National Night Out Against Crime on Hopkins Street.

One of the agency’s most enthusiastic supporters, Jerido regrets not being able to serve as often as he would like. Although he looks forward to the next chance to volunteer, the former MARTA bus driver was recently promoted to a rail operator which is much more demanding and time-consuming.
“Having referred citizens to this board,” Stellmacher continued, “there has been a very good outcome in terms of how these cases were pursued and cases that have been won.

This agency has been a long time coming and it’s here now. The thing that disappoints me is that more citizens are not taking advantage of this powerful agency.”

Stellmacher is not hesitant about using unorthodox methods to get the media to fight his cause. Legend has it that he once staged a “heart attack” and fell out on the floor during a meeting of the Atlanta City Council to get the attention of the mayor.

When a friend’s mother died in Hartford, CT and the American Heart Association (AHA) said it could not serve her due in part to a lack of support in the African American community, Reverend Stellmacher put on a pair of roller skates, skated five days, 360 miles in support of AHA and presented the skates to then-President Jimmy Carter. “I asked (AHA) ‘What can I do to prevent this from happening again?’ That’s why (at local African American community events) today there are AHA screenings for high blood pressure and diabetes.”

Currently, Reverend Stellmacher is challenging residents in African American communities to stop committing violence against each other, citing the disproportionate number of young black males being killed by young black males. He is visiting inner city neighborhoods teaching Dr. King’s six non-violent principles and distributing flyers saying “Stop the Violence.” “Us killing us must stop,” insists Reverend Stellmacher.

“I attribute this energy to God. I promised God that if He provided me with an education, I would give it back to the least of these...those who can’t afford attorney’s fees or to send kids to college or the people who can’t afford to get their lights turned back on or falsely accused. I promised to use the knowledge He has granted me for those who felt their civil rights were violated. God has blessed me on several occasions with the necessary resources to accomplish the goals that I set out on...men and women incarcerated for instance, denied the right to vote. God allowed us to overturn because you can vote in jail while awaiting trial until you are convicted.

Seeking out the ACRB has been a blessing to our city, but there’s still work to be done. I am thankful to God that put it in the hands of an Executive Director who takes no tea for the fever.”

Ms. Jackson spoke to the student’s mother who alleged her daughter suffered hearing loss after the incident. “If you’re gonna tase someone, you should hit your target and be trained to do it. You should be properly trained if you’re gonna tase children,” said Jackson.

The ACRB Board sustained the excessive force complaint against Officer Antwan Dennison and recommended a four-day suspension, training on the use of excessive force and Fourth Amendment rights.

Following a formal APS hearing, Tara Jackson’s son was permanently banned from APS. He has been in therapy since the incident, dealing with his issues with authority figures.