The View of the Executive Director

Once upon a time, when he was still floating like a butterfly and stinging like a bee, Muhammad Ali, one of the greatest prize fighters in history, was asked why he always visits low income neighborhoods and poor people whenever and wherever he travels. Ali immediately responded that when he grew up in Louisville, KY, his mother taught him that “service to others is the rent we pay for our room in the hereafter...” He explained to the reporter that he had no choice but to serve.

This is why we continually highlight the many contributions that you have made to ACRB and honor community leaders and volunteers who selflessly contribute their time, talents and resources to improve those with the least in our society. Clearly, given the many who selfishly choose not to serve, those who do should be recognized while they can still smell the roses.

What better tribute than to publicly acknowledge their efforts and bestow a special honor to the few, like Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery, for a lifetime of achievements for the poor and oppressed?

When we come together as responsible citizens and vigilantly 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.

A Unique Recognition Ceremony for the Community and Rev. Joseph Lowery

The annual ACRB holiday board reception took on new meaning in December 2015 as the agency also formally recognized those in the community who made significant contributions to ACRB.

For the first time, in honor of the memory of the late Ms. Kathryn Johnston, the ACRB awarded a crystal sculpture bearing her name entitled the “Kathryn Johnston Spirit of Truth Award.” The awardees were honored with a catered buffet and music in the festively decorated Old Council Chambers Auditorium at City Hall Tower.

The ACRB in its current form was established by law in 2007 following public outrage heard around the nation over the shooting of the 92 year old grandmother during a botched raid on Neal Street in Northwest Atlanta. Subsequent state and federal investigations found Atlanta police officers lied, planted evidence and tried to get an informant to verify their versions of what happened that night. Truth prevailed. Some officers went to prison. Others were fired. (continued on page 4)
The Kathryn Johnston Spirit of Truth Award

Each year, ACRB will recognize citizen contributions to ACRB and bestow the Kathryn Johnston Spirit of Truth Award, the agency’s highest civilian honor, for outstanding community service.

“...WE HAVE TO GET THE WORD OUT BECAUSE MANY OF THE PEOPLE THAT WE ENCOUNTERED DID NOT KNOW THAT WE ARE HERE AND DID NOT KNOW WHAT WE DO.”

Brian Fleming, ACRB Sr. Investigator

Among recipients of The Community Leader Award was former Board member Maceo Williams who has been a tireless advocate for the poor and disenfranchised.

Trumpeter Julian Smith offered a stirring musical tribute.
Testimonials: “When I think of ACRB...”

“...I think it was okay how they (ACRB) handled the situation...”

Can you possibly imagine being stripped-naked by police? Joseph Bryant says that is exactly what sworn officers of the Atlanta Police Department did to him.

Part of the incident was captured on surveillance tape outside an Atlanta convenience store restroom.

They were searching Bryant for marijuana possession which they allegedly found. “There is no reason to take a grown man into a convenience store bathroom and strip search him,” said Investigator A.D. Brunson from the Atlanta Municipal Public Defender’s Office, having read the Atlanta Police Department’s standard operating procedure for searching a citizen.

Bryant at the time was visiting from Orlando with a female friend who was driving. His friend parked by a no-parking sign and went inside a convenience store when an Atlanta police car pulled up. Bryant was unable to legally move the vehicle. He did not have a driver’s license. But his immediate concern was trying to hide a small bag of weed. “I ain’t got no license...I was like, ‘Damn, what should I do?’”

As soon as he tried to leave the vehicle and hid the bag, he said an APD officer instructed him to “sit down in the car. Then he made it his business to open the car door, call for backup and pull me out the back seat. The sergeant started smelling me.” Bryant denied having any weed on him.

By this time a half dozen squad cars and a crowd surrounded the scene.

“It got to a point where...he said ‘Okay, you say you got nuthin’, come over here.’” Bryant said the officers went into the convenience store and, with the owner’s permission, escorted him into the restroom where they proceeded to remove all his clothing and search him. A small bag of weed was found inside his private parts. He was arrested and sent to jail.

Despite the spectacle Bryant initially thought it was nevertheless a minor incident, a petit misdemeanor requiring the payment of a small fine. He was ready to pay the penalty and return to Orlando.

But Investigator Brunson from the Atlanta Municipal Public Defender’s Office says the way the search was done violated Bryant’s constitutional rights and the police department’s standard operating procedure.

Brunson says after he saw the surveillance tape, he shared the case with various court officials and then intercepted Bryant’s attempt to plead guilty to the possession charge in court. The court case was ultimately thrown out after officials viewed the tape. He instead directed Bryant to the APD’s Office of Professional Standards and the ACRB where he filed a false arrest complaint.

Subsequently, the ACRB investigators and the board agreed that it was a clear case of false arrest because the officers failed to follow proper procedures. The Board called for a one day suspension for Sgt. Robert Daniels, a written reprimand for Officer Brian Carnwell and called for both officers to receive training on proper procedure and protocols on conducting searches in the field.

Investigator Brunson says the two officers were subsequently disciplined by APD. But he contends that the case of Joseph Bryant is not an isolated incident.

Bryant said when he thinks about ACRB, “I think it was okay how they handled the situation.”

“...I appreciate them (ACRB) for doing something...”

Steven McDowell is an Atlanta native with deep ties to the community dating back generations. He says a relative, Branch Carrington, was the first black tennis instructor at the Washington Park Tennis Center. He considers himself a man of principle which is why McDowell approached the ACRB with a false imprisonment complaint against an Atlanta Police Department (APD) officer.

McDowell, who works in the hotel industry, said “I was riding through the community where I have lived for 15 years looking for my cousin when I saw a police car vaguely out of the left side of my eye, but I paid it no attention. I kept riding and made a left on University when he flagged me near the onramp (to the interstate). I drove to a safe spot and ended on the onramp. He said he had been following me driving around and began naming streets, asking me why I was driving up this street and that street and if I knew there were prostitutes and drug addicts. I told him I have family there.”

The officer asked for his license, but as he reached for his wallet, McDowell realized that it was missing. He had stopped at a bank earlier. He thought perhaps he misplaced it there. So he accepted the ticket for driving without a license. That is when the officer ordered him out of his own neighborhood.

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The first recipient of the Kathryn Johnston Spirit of Truth Award is Reverend Dr. Joseph E. Lowery. The decision to honor Dr. Lowery with this first time award that represents ACRB’s highest level of civilian recognition is due, in part, not only to his renowned legacy of civil rights and non-violent activism, but also for playing a key role in ACRB’s creation and his commitment to civilian oversight in the City of Atlanta.

Traditionally, each year during the Christmas season, following its December board meeting, ACRB holds an appreciation dinner for board members. However, this year marks the beginning of a new tradition to honor community leaders whose contributions have been instrumental in assisting the agency in its mission to improve the quality of public safety services for the City of Atlanta, and the relationship between the Police and Corrections department and the community.

This year’s Community Leader Award recipients included former ACRB Board member Maceo Williams; Brianna Wells, Parliamentarian for the Lambda Nu Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc.; Michelle Bennett, Youth Services Manager for the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System; and citizen volunteers Lawrence Williams and Ron Jerido. ACRB current board members were also honored, and a special pinning ceremony was held to honor ACRB’s inaugural board members.

Regrettably, Reverend Lowery had to cancel his appearance due to a sudden death in his family. The Kathryn Johnston Spirit of Truth Award was accepted on his behalf by ACRB Board Chair William Harrison.

Upon receipt of the trophy, Dr. Lowery expressed delight and appreciation for the recognition and indicated that he was “pleased and grateful” for being ACRB’s first recipient of the Kathryn Johnston Spirit of Truth Award. He loved the statue and also stated how unfortunate it was that he was unable to attend.

Steven McDowell
(from page 3)

“He said ‘I need you to leave the area because the area has prostitutes and heavy drug traffic.’ I felt that he had no reason to pull me over. Everybody who rides through communities (is) not buying drugs. This is my community.”

McDowell filed a false imprisonment complaint with the ACRB because “I feel it’s a form of imprisonment when someone pulls you over and doesn’t allow you to leave (when) I have done nothing…”

ACRB investigated and sustained his complaint. The Board referred his case to APD’s Office of Professional Standards (OPS) and recommended disciplinary action. However, some seven months later, McDowell says he has received no word about the case from OPS. As he patiently awaits the final outcome, McDowell says “I appreciate (ACRB) for doing something.”

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