



TOWN OF RIVERHEAD  
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**Accredited Agency**

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## **C.O.P.E. UNITS PARTNER WITH RESIDENTS TO IMPROVE RIVERHEAD**

The highly-trained Riverhead Community Oriented Policing Enforcement (C.O.P.E.) unit proactively seeks to improve the quality of life of residents and visitors through its active presence and involvement in the community.

The C.O.P.E. unit investigates and responds to community complaints of criminal activity, focusing on quality of life issues. "We work together with residents and the community to foster better communication in order to address what is immediately ailing the community," said Sergeant Sean Egan, who has been a Riverhead Police Officer for nearly 22 years. At present, Egan oversees five police officers in the C.O.P.E. Unit. The C.O.P.E. Unit assists the Riverhead Police Detective Division, as well as numerous outside law enforcement agencies.

Community policing is a philosophy that promotes strategies, which support the use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder and fear of crime, according to the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ) website. It also utilizes community partnerships with other law enforcement agencies and community groups.

"C.O.P.E. recognizes that police cannot solve public safety issues and crime alone," Chief David Hegermiller said. "The C.O.P.E. unit allows us to work closely with the community to address the issues that plague society in order to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods." Fostering relationships and communication often leads to information that results in the resolution of problems and arrests.

Hegermiller said the C.O.P.E. unit has evolved from the special patrols that the Riverhead Police Department initiated approximately 20 years ago, and was previously called the Street Crime Unit before becoming C.O.P.E., a concept that began to be actively promoted by the USDOJ in the mid-1990s.

"The main theory behind C.O.P.E. is to respond to quality of life issues in ways beyond what normal police patrols usually do," Hegermiller said. "The C.O.P.E. Unit will further investigate problems when normal police patrol enforcement is not enough. They can spend more time to resolve issues."

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The value of human life is immeasurable. As we dedicate ourselves to the service of our residents and others in our community, Department personnel will actively preserve, protect and respect human life and the dignity of all people.

In recent years, the C.O.P.E. Unit has been actively involved with all the local schools in Riverhead Town. The Chief noted they are heavily involved with the Riverhead Council for Unity and speak to the students involved in the program weekly. He said that this has helped foster better relationships with students. Getting to know and developing a good rapport with students has helped form a bond of trust between the officer and student. It has also increased some students' interest in careers in criminal justice.

As the safety of students is paramount, Hegermiller said, "We try to maintain a regular and random presence in our local schools." He said the C.O.P.E. unit deploys marked and unmarked police units to all the schools regularly and often send uniformed officers into the schools to meet with school administrators. C.O.P.E. officers attend most public school events, including athletic events. Similarly, the C.O.P.E. Unit maintains a working relationship with the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts.

The C.O.P.E. Unit also works cooperatively with other local law enforcement agencies. For example, they maintain a database of confirmed gang members and share that information with other area police departments, Hegermiller said. "In turn, these other agencies share information with Riverhead."

The Riverhead Police Officers involved with the C.O.P.E. unit receive regular training to increase their effectiveness. Hegermiller said flexibility is key, "While a large percentage of crimes are drug-related, particular issues and problems are forever changing." This fluid environment necessitates officers keeping up with criminal trends." Most officers in the C.O.P.E. Unit are motorcycle and quad certified. "This allows for a leaner and more mobile unit," he said. The officers also receive boat training to assist the Riverhead Bay Constable in protecting Riverhead's waters to address issues such as aggressive boating and Boating While Intoxicated.

C.O.P.E. seeks to continually attack issues that affect local neighborhoods before they worsen. Such efforts, though largely unseen, clearly work. For example, many residents remember the graffiti problem that worsened in 2010. It was through the diligent investigations of the C.O.P.E. unit that several individuals who were in the involved majority of the graffiti incidents were arrested, according to Riverhead Police. Currently, the C.O.P.E. officers are increasing the police presence in the downtown Riverhead business district to prevent lawlessness and ensure the safety of those visiting Main Street's shops and restaurants. "C.O.P.E. officers are walking the entire business district regularly and stopping into businesses to talk with owners," Hegermiller said.

C.O.P.E. is also actively involved in DWI, narcotics and prostitution investigations. Along with the other East End town police departments, C.O.P.E. participates in Op-Shield in boarding and investigating foreign flag vessels. These anti-terrorism investigations are reimbursed through the New York State Office of Homeland Security.

In addition, the C.O.P.E. Unit assists the Suffolk County Department of Health in combating the sale of tobacco to minors, and with the New York State Liquor Authority in the sale of alcohol to those under 21.

The C.O.P.E. Unit regularly needs to evaluate what are the top priorities. We adjust to the flavor of the week, what the current problem is," Egan said. "Where potential criminal exists that's where you'll see us-- plain clothes or uniformed to keep the bad guys guessing."