

# COALITION CORNER

## Profile: Chief J. David Smith, Narragansett Police



"Every day is different," explains Chief J. David Smith of the Narragansett Police Department (NPD)

when describing his current position. The Narragansett--URI Coalition has been one of the Chief Smith's key commitments since becoming head of the NPD.

Improving relations between URI students living in Narragansett and full-time residents has always been one of Chief Smith's major concerns. He praises the Coalition for giving both students and town residents a voice. "When people work together to solve problems, the solution is more meaningful." He wants people to be able to say that they "made a difference."

Chief Smith formerly led the Westerly Police Department. His daughter attends the Pier School, where he volunteers as an adult mentor for another student. He also teaches a class in Police and Community Relations at Roger Williams University.

One of the Coalition's best outcomes, according to Chief Smith, is that people from all walks of life can work together to make the community a better place. He credits fellow Coalition co-chair Dr. Tom Dougan, URI Vice President of Student Affairs, with being a "calming influence" and says that they understand each other and value their shared mission.

With the Coalition, says Chief Smith, Narragansett residents get the opportunity to work with URI students, which steadily erodes the idea that students are a "neighborhood nemesis" and instead reveals them for what they are: a valued part of the community.

Smith cites the example of a community member, owner of a local waste management company, who reported that many students were throwing away good food at the end of each semester. This led members of the Coalition's Programming Subcommittee to organize a food drive. The enthusiastic response of more than 40 URI student volunteers resulted in the contribution of several truckloads of food to the Jonnycake Center.

Chief Smith believes that the Coalition made a "quantum leap" after assigning members to task-oriented subcommittees. A subcommittee focused on neighborhood problems helped get the "Scarlet Letter" town ordinance passed, which allows police, after issuing a citation, to put an 8½" x 11" bright orange sticker on the front door of an offending house, warning those who enter that they can be heavily fined for disturbing the peace.

Chief Smith sums it up: "Police prefer to be proactive and preventive, rather than deal in retribution." Smith reports that students have responded well to the new ordinance, with the residents of only a few houses persisting with a loud party long enough to be branded with the sticker.

"The Coalition's greatest value is the ability to communicate on a direct level," Chief Smith notes. He explains that the URI-Narragansett Coalition can dispel myths among realtors, students, and local vendors by analyzing the complex problems, finding solutions, and then monitoring the results.

Chief Smith is extremely optimistic about the Coalition's future. Although the faces will change, he trusts that the Coalition's work will continue to be built on the hope for positive change rather than anger and frustration. "We need to keep the momentum going forward," Chief Smith says. "If we continue to respect and work together, the common good will prevail."

For more information about the Narragansett--URI Coalition, please e-mail or call Jim Hurton, Communications Subcommittee Chairperson at [jhurton@narragansetttri.com](mailto:jhurton@narragansetttri.com), 783-7121 or Paula Santos, Coalition Coordinator at [pmsantos@uri.edu](mailto:pmsantos@uri.edu), 874-2583. And please visit our website at [www.uri.edu/alcohol/coalition](http://www.uri.edu/alcohol/coalition).