

## Providence a fine model of problem-oriented policing

JEANNE COLA

**T**his week hundreds of law-enforcement officers from around the world will gather here to talk about innovative ways to bring down crime and make neighborhoods safer. The gathering will be at the conference of the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing.

Why Providence? Because when it comes to community safety, Providence gets it. That's not to say that we don't have serious challenges here. We still lose too many people to drugs, violence and prison. We still have too many seniors afraid to go out after dark, and too many kids afraid to walk to school. But several years ago this city realized that it could not "arrest" its way out of these problems. If we want to make our neighborhoods healthier, we need to make our streets safer. And our police can't do it alone.

Providence stands at the forefront of a model that tackles a complex problem with a solution that is pretty simple at its core: Community safety is everybody's job.

When it comes to fighting crime, neighbors and small businesses, churches and banks, health providers and elected officials — in concert with law enforcement — have vital roles to play. Mayor Angel Taveras has laid the foundation with his outreach to the faith community and support for crime-watch groups. We can build on this together.

The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) has been driving this type of model of comprehensive community development for decades. Because when you fight crime, you fight poverty. The progress that we've witnessed time and again isn't measured by lower crime stats alone. Progress is measured by the overall quality of life in struggling neighborhoods. Can residents find good, solid jobs? Can they live in decent homes? Can they shop at the local grocery store and send their kids to strong, safe schools?

When we can answer "yes" to questions like those, we know Jeanne Cola is executive director of the Rhode Island Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) unit.

That's a model worth replicating. And it's a model made possible by the approach to problem-solving and partnership that more law-enforcement officials will learn at this week's conference. We hope that they will take what they learn home, so that towns across America get the chance to experience what Providence already knows: When communities are safe, property values rise, city coffers grow and jobs flourish.

When everybody helps, everybody wins.

we're getting somewhere. At LISC we call that Building Sustainable Communities. It starts with safe streets, and it works. Take a close look at Providence's Olneyville neighborhood. Fifteen years ago, it was one of the most dangerous places in Rhode Island, its challenges overwhelming. Buildings were crumbling. Many businesses had long-since fled. Green space, where it existed, was dangerous. Drug dealers made the rules. Olneyville families felt as if they were under siege.

Not anymore. Today, there is new housing, safe parks and bike paths. Businesses are growing and schools are on the mend. Dilapidated apartment buildings and storefronts have been re-stored. Gang and drug activity are down. Jobs programs are helping residents find work. Certainly, Olneyville isn't all the way there yet. But its progress is real and lasting. Today, Olneyville is a good place to live.

How did Olneyville do it? People with a stake in making things better, such as those in the Olneyville Housing Corporation, joined hands with the Providence Police Department.

It wasn't easy. At first, residents didn't fully trust the police, whose members questioned how well community development would stop urgent crime problems. But they all eventually sat down at the same table, came up with a plan and executed it together.