

P.L.E.A. EXPLORER

VOLUME 4

FALL 1999

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M E S S A G E F R O M T H E P R E S I D E N T

The leaves are finally flying and the season of Autumn has arrived. Activities like Oktoberfest, Renaissance Festivals, and Halloween are in full bloom in our parks and communities, but this is also the time of the Hunter.

The Hunter has been waiting all year for the cool breezes to start blowing. Gearing up for the hunt with family and friends. The preparation for the hunt is sometimes bigger than the hunt itself. Deer in rut, ducks on the pond, and turkey on the move, are just a few of the vivid thoughts that the Hunter anticipates for the upcoming trip.

This is also, a very busy time of year for a group of individuals that have dedicated their lives to protecting wildlife and the management thereof. I am talking about those men and women that are protecting and regulating our hunting and wildlife areas, the Game Warden, Conservation Officer, and the Park Ranger.

Think about the possibilities just for a minute. Most of the people we deal with during the hunting seasons when checking limits and licenses are in possession of some type of weapon. Granted most of the people we deal with are great folks, but some of the people that we encounter make you think twice about this profession. Most, if not all of our agencies are short handed, trying to do the job of two or three people and covering vast amounts of land. Some officers are covering four or five counties, or thousands of acres, all by themselves, with a backup forty-five minutes to an hour away.

You would think that hunting in its broadest sense is a very regulated sport, but there are plenty of poachers out there these days getting by in their evil ways. Some poachers have been in the business so long that it has been passed on from one generation to another. It is a way of life for some. Getting caught and paying fines are just one of the expenses in their business. Sure the odds are in their favor, but we have some gifted wardens and officers out there, in the heat and cold, with some old and new techniques trying to catch these tricky poachers. Radio collars for tracking wildlife, mechanical dummy wildlife, GPS and DNA are here to stay, and are great tools of the profession. Public awareness and harsher fines will help, but it won't stop those poachers. So as we head into the season of the Hunter, think about those men and women that put their life on the line so that others may experience the beauty of our wildlife for years to come. The future depends on it. Those poachers will get theirs sooner or later.

Good Luck and Be Safe!



Chief Steve Pokrywka with Kansas City, Kansas
Wyandotte County Park Rangers

**To the Game Wardens and Conservation
Officers of our lands, PLEA salutes you!**



Trends in Park Law Enforcement

Discussed at Missouri Parks and Recreation Conference

John I. Nesbit currently serves as the Assistant Chief Park Ranger for the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation and is a current PLEA member. He has 21 years of experience with that agency and has also worked with the Kansas City Missouri Parks and Recreation Department, Missouri State Parks and the United States Park Police. He can be reached at:

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Fax 314-963-7720*

On March 3, 1999, two Park Rangers from the St. Louis County Parks and Recreation Department presented a talk and slide show of current trends in park law enforcement for the 1999 annual MRPA conference and exposition which was held in Columbia Mo. The Rangers had been asked to participate in the conference because of increasing interest in security and crime in parks and recreation settings. Assistant Chief Park Ranger John I. Nesbit and Park Ranger Supervisor Stephen M. Tiemann put together the program of philosophy of park law enforcement, current crime trends across the nation and techniques that their department utilizes to address problems. Steve, the bike patrol supervisor, provided demonstration bike equipment and a slide show to enhance the presentation.

Attendees were asked "What do people expect while they engage in recreational activities?" and across the board they answered clean and safe facilities. A discussion then centered on **the three "P's" that the SLC Park Rangers use to help achieve those results: Protection, Public Relations and Programming.** While UCR statistics show that most violent and property crimes have continued to decline across the U.S., people still have a perception that they are unsafe in many places including parks. It is in this climate that park law enforcement officers must function. The idea that many administrators have of law enforcement equaling harassment must be changed to a strategy of providing for public safety. This is what the public wants and can only enhance the image of departments that are meeting that need. Decreased visitations to areas perceived as "unsafe" (whether they are, in fact, does not matter) can hurt parks' services. Seeing law enforcement officers in communities on foot, bike and in schools as part of Community Oriented Policing and School Resource Officer programs is commonplace today. Most visitors are happy to see Park Rangers on patrol in parks, at recreation complexes and on trails because it gives them a sense of security.

Differences between traditional law enforcement and park law enforcement were discussed by the group. The major difference being the goal of compliance and education whenever the violation warrants it. Visitors who come to parks are concentrating on having fun and sometimes are easy victims. Dealing with suspects who prey on visitors should be the highest priority of any park law enforcement agency. The Rangers also discussed the idea of neighborhood parks and how an agency should be a good neighbor to residents around facilities in order to build support for its mission. St. Louis County's Park Watch program is an example of this. Visitors and adjacent homeowners are encouraged to call the departments' hotline (314-962-ISAW) and report suspicious activities, ordinance violations, natural resource problems, safety hazards or maintenance needs. Callers can leave a message ("you can remain anonymous!") or speak directly to their dispatchers. Fliers, magnets, trail etiquette brochures and community nights are provided to publicize this effort. As a result of the hotline several dumping cases have been closed and in February a robbery suspect was identified and charged as a result of a hotline call by a victim.

Since most department maintenance budgets cannot withstand too many large damaged property incidents, Park Rangers shared their loss recovery tips. In this program suspects that are identified as damaging county property are given a choice to make restitution to the department. While court fines and costs go to other agencies, a restitution payment can go directly back to the parks budget for direct repair of damaged property. That way the violator learns the true cost of his/her actions and the department can spend tax dollars wisely on other projects, not repairs. Many times violators come out and perform the repairs themselves under the park supervisors' direction. The department can waive prosecution for successful completion of the program. A program like this increases cooperation between Rangers and maintenance staff and can lead to increased morale among workers.

The session closed with Steve talking about the departments' highly successful bike patrol donation program and the new volunteer "Trail Watch" which will be implemented later on this year. Attendees at this session of the conference were able to earn .1CEU and evaluations indicated the program was well received.

I would encourage each of you to take every opportunity to make similar presentations in order to share your expertise with others and assist departments with their park law enforcement needs.

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If your state is not currently an affiliate, contact P.L.E.A. for details on how to start.



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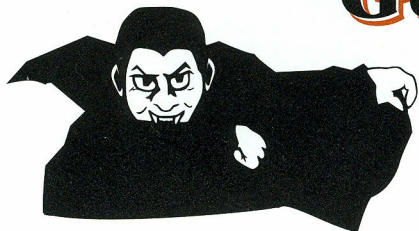
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Gothic Sub-Culture

Role-Play or Trouble?

by: Sergeant Tim Nagle Johnson County Park Police

Over the past couple of years, a curious group of young people in their mid to late teens started to use Antioch Park, within Johnson County Park and Recreation District, for what seemed a harmless role-playing game. Most of the Rangers contacted the group due their tardiness in leaving the park at closing time. The group would dress in dark clothing and make-up, depicting Vampires. The Rangers even became accustomed to seeing the group and the group was very polite and did not cause any problems. In the spring of 1999, two complaints were received at the Park Police offices, in reference to the group. The complaints were on the heels of the Columbine High school shootings in Littleton, Colorado. The first was a man who noticed that some individuals in the group were dressed in long black trench coats, alarming him because of the recent Columbine shooting. The second was a woman, on her way to the playground with her 2-year-old daughter, who became suspicious of the group when she noticed some of the youth had on long black trench coats. As the woman went around the group, she heard someone in the group yell, "Get down on the ground, freeze, I'll shoot". The woman naturally thought she was being told to get down, so she grabbed her daughter and lay, prone, on the ground in fear. She mustered up the courage to look back to the group and realized the group was not talking to her. However she left the park not knowing if the situation was real or not, and was very alarmed by the incident.

We took the report as Disorderly Conduct and immediately recognized the group to be the same "Vampires" we all had talked to in the past. We even knew their schedule of when they used the park. Rangers were directed to meet the group on their next visit to the park and identify the group's individuals. The next time the group came to the park we talked with 4-5 individuals beginning to gather and found out that the group can be as large as 50 people and range in age from 11 to 25 years of age. Rangers identified 30-35 individuals. It became apparent that they belonged to the "Gothic Sub-Culture". The group was told of the possible Disorderly Conduct charges stemming from the woman's complaint and explained that the behavior had come to a level of causing public alarm and grounds for dismissal from the park. The group agreed to not attract attention to themselves and would be more careful with their role-playing. Also, plain-clothes surveillance was used to further observe the group and gain more information about their activity, members, etc. While under surveillance, it was discovered that the group, at times, would approach other park visitors to intimidate and elicit a response to their role-playing. It was not too long before more complaints were coming in, and Rangers re-contacted the group. This time it was discovered that some members had weapons such as knives concealed in canes used for role-play. The group was politely asked to leave and to not use any Johnson County Park and Recreation parks again.

Who are these "Goths" as they are called for short? I found numerous web sites for this group, most notably; www.gothics.org/subculture. I found that the "Sub-Culture" is nation wide and stems from the 1980's "punk" era. The term "Gothic" means, "Of or pertaining to a literary style of fiction prevalent in the late 18th and 19th centuries which emphasized the grotesque, mysterious, and desolate: a gothic novel". Thus, the "Vampire" games in the previous years at Antioch Park. However, the group at Antioch Park went beyond playing a game and not attracting attention to themselves. The group at Antioch Park began to come on a regular basis and role-played other acts, which were disturbing to the public. The group seemed to enjoy dressing in elaborate dark costumes and make-up and being very loud about killing and destroying things and people. The individuals also wear army fatigues and trench coats. I am not an expert on the sub-culture, but have learned quite a bit through our experience. I was going to get pictures for this article, but the sub-culture is too varied in dress and actions to have one or two pictures try to portray these groups. The web-site offers a profile page, which profiles a dozen or so "Goths" from around the nation. This page offers a good look at the people involved in the sub-culture.

A few weeks later, the group surfaced again in a Lenexa, Kansas park and the Lenexa Police removed them from their parks as well.

The role-playing games, called "Chronicles" of vampire life, are played in many U.S. and European cities. Everyone acts out his or her own character and plot line. Most of the story lines are about struggle for control of the city-who can gain control of the other vampires and humans in the city. Colored masks are used to denote status in the game. For example a green mask or something yellow means that other role-players can not see them. Confused? Check out the web-site and you can learn all you want to know about "Goths". Removing them from our parks was necessary due to the high rate of alarm the group brings upon itself. Due to the range in ages and vastness of the "sub-culture", there is no telling what this group was capable of doing if left un-checked. They seem to thrive on conflict, which ultimately leads to problems when an individual of the group acts aside from the group. The group at Antioch Park was given several opportunities to modify this issue of concern, but chose to continue the alarming behavior in our parks. They seemed harmless, however upon closer examination we discovered weapons and a passion for conflict role-playing. Be courteous, yet firm. They respect authority. Explain the issues they bring upon themselves with their behavior. They will not respond well to, "Get out and don't come back". The older individuals are aware of the laws and know when they have crossed the line. Due to the size of the group we did not file the Disorderly Conduct charges, but we have a large list of the identified individuals. Currently they do not come to our parks for their role-playing.

KENTUCKY STATE PARK RANGERS

contributed by
Mark Reeder

The Division of Kentucky Park Rangers is a department within the Kentucky State Park System. The Kentucky State Parks are currently celebrating their 75th Anniversary. The Park system began in 1924 with only a handful of state parks. Today, the KY Park Service manages 50 state parks with a wide range of sizes, locations, and facilities. Kentucky has 17 resort parks. Each of these resort parks has a lodge, a dining room, pool, and a gift shop. Many of them also have golf courses, marinas, campgrounds, trails, museums, country stores, tennis courts, and other facilities. The Park system also has 14 historic site parks. Each of these parks highlights a certain aspect of Kentucky's rich history. Many of these sites also have golf courses, campgrounds, etc. The remainder of the parks are known as recreation parks (sometimes known as day use parks). Recreational parks also feature a wide variety of uses such as marinas, camping, golf, trails, etc. State parks may be found in every corner of the state.

The Kentucky State Park System lays claim to being the "Nation's Finest" park system. The system draws around 7.9 million visitors each year and draws 282 million a year in total economic impact. A 1993 survey stated that KY Parks were the 7th most visited park system in the country. The same survey went on to state that Kentucky ranked third in total revenues. Most pundits believe that Kentucky's status has increased significantly over the past six years.

The Department of Parks recently underwent a 100 million-dollar renovation plan and is currently working on a 25 million-dollar golf course package for 7 state parks. The Department of Parks employs 1400 full time workers. 80 of these workers are responsible for the security and safety of the parks' visitors and facilities. They are the Division of Park Rangers.

The first KY Park Rangers began in 1972. The agency was funded through federal and state allocations. In 1973, the Rangers became totally state funded and became a branch of the Kentucky State Police. By 1980, the agency reverted back to the Park's 'department but remained separate from the Department of Parks.



By 1986 (and today), the Rangers became a division within the KY Department of Parks. The Park Ranger may be found in 32 of our state parks. All resort parks have at least three Rangers. During times of crisis or special events, Rangers may be sent to those parks that have no full-time security.

K.R.S. 148.056 grants the Park Commissioner with the authority to employ and commission Park Rangers with full police powers. Therefore, all KY Park Rangers are Park Police. All KY Park Rangers are sworn law enforcement officers. They have the right to carry firearms, issue citations, make arrests, conduct investigations, and so forth. The Rangers receive their training from the Eastern KY Law Enforcement Academy. All police officers (save the KY State Police) receive their certification from this academy. Additional training is provided by the Parks Department itself. The Ranger Division is lead by one Colonel and two Captains.

Additional duties of Park Rangers vary from park to park. Some Rangers do strictly law enforcement and security while others participate in interpretive programs, Jr. Rgr. Programs, trail construction, and public safety issues. In a year's time, KY Park Rangers average several arrests, accident reports, investigations, and complaints. The KY Park Ranger is one of the earliest (and still one of the finest) examples of community oriented policing.

Current problems with the KY Ranger Division stems from high turnover rates, conflicting agendas (law enforcement vs. customer service), low pay, improper weapons and gear, and the increase in crime and violence in our country which has spilled into our parks. Despite this, the KY Park Ranger perseveres and strives to uphold our proud and excellent legacy.



WEB SITE UPDATE:

www.parkranger.com

Feedback for the updates to the web site have been incredibly positive. Although there is still far to go in terms of content, there has been positive feedback from members as well as non-members. Through the site, many people have been convinced to join P.L.E.A.

The next phase of development will include a focus on available course listings for related classes as well as workshops, seminars, etc. It will be up to the many active P.L.E.A. members to supply us with such information and we will continue to prompt for such assistance through this publication and directly through the web site.



On average, the web site receives about four or five e-mails per day. Most of them are requesting information about how to become a park ranger and specifics such as average annual pay, etc. Other subjects include garment orders, membership renewals, etc.

Currently, an auto-responder is sent to those who inquire prompting them to the discussion boards and job forum for information. We hope to build specific in-depth responses to those who are seeking information about park rangers and related professions. If you can help, don't hesitate on passing us the information- send e-mails to:

content@parkranger.com

Thank you in advance for any input.

D I G I T A L G R A P H I T I

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