

## For Minneapolis police liaison, community trust built one handshake at a time

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People & Places

Sherman Patterson, left, greets Cub Foods manager Ed Anderson before a meeting at the north Minneapolis, Minn. store Tuesday, April 1, 2014. Sherman Patterson was hired as the Minneapolis Police Department's community engagement coordinator, building relationships with minority populations and youth in the community. *Jeffrey Thompson/MPR News*

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Follow Sherman Patterson around Minneapolis and it doesn't take long to see why the police department chose him as its community engagement coordinator.

Stepping from a recent meeting with his boss, Minneapolis Police Chief Janeé Harteau, Patterson found Larry McKenzie, coach of the North High School boys basketball team. After some quick introductions and a photo, they were off again to the next meeting. The brief exchange, though, built a small bridge between a community leader and the chief.

It's one of the reasons Harteau created the position for Patterson this year. He knows a lot of people — especially people who don't normally interact comfortably with police officers.

Harteau is trying to improve relations between the department and the city's many ethnic and racial minorities, which have historically been contentious. Besides creating the new coordinator position, Harteau also meets with a citizen advisory group, made up of city residents, community activists, clergy and high ranking MPD officers.

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(<http://www.mprnews.org/story/2013/08/05/news/police-harteau-rebuild-trust>)

Patterson, though, brings a unique background to the work of building relationships. He's a retired soldier, a mentor to kids on the north side, and nephew of a heavyweight boxing champion. Patterson is also the recipient of a \$100,000 Bush Foundation Fellowship, which he says he'll use to help keep kids away from guns.

"He's almost like a reference," Harteau said. "People are initially hesitant to work with police officers. It's this unknown. It's scary to folks. I mean, that's the whole thing about fear is it's about the unknown. Sherman can say, 'look, I work for the chief.'"

Before he worked for the chief, Patterson worked for former Mayor R.T. Rybak for eight years as a public safety aide. As a part of the job, Patterson sometimes had to wake the mayor early in the morning to tell him about the violent deaths of Minneapolis children. Patterson often accompanied the mayor to meet with the grieving parents.

Patterson, 49, said he was inspired to pursue public service many years ago in Savannah, Ga., where he was born and raised.

"I grew up in a tough environment. However, I was surrounded by a lot of mentors," Patterson said. "I came from a broken home. My dad wasn't there."

Some young people carry guns for protection, others for show; others grew up around family members who illegally possessed guns, he added.

"If you look at where the guns — as far as our community — where the guns are coming from, they see it from a small age," he said. "How do we break that cycle?"

Patterson is still developing his program. So far, his plans are to recruit between 10 and 20 African-American and Somali kids who are at least 13 years old. He hopes to immerse them in existing youth programs and mentor and track their progress.

The work has become particularly important now at this stage of his life. A married father of two, Patterson will soon become a grandfather.

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