

North Side has a new 'top cop'

Written by Gail Olson

Posted 10/31/2007

Michael Martin, 4th Precinct Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) Inspector, has been on the job since Aug. 9. At the time he was appointed, he said, he was a bit preoccupied.

"I was the investigative commander for the I-35W bridge. [The bridge collapsed Aug. 1.] In the middle of that, Chief [Tim] Dolan asked me to take over command of the precinct. I was extremely excited, but so busy at the time that it almost didn't sink in. It was a good thing, too, because it gave me some time to think. In my case, it was 'Be careful what you wish for,' because I had once told him it would be my dream job.

"I'm excited, but I'm scared, too. I'm not stupid. There's a great deal of responsibility on this job," Martin said. "I view the 4th Precinct as the ultimate challenge in law enforcement in the state of Minnesota. You have a neighborhood that unfortunately suffers from the highest rates of violent crime and property crime in the city. There is poverty. Houses are boarded up. However, there are a tremendous number of good people here who want to make a difference and are committed to living on the North Side. I think the North Side has the potential to be an awesome historical neighborhood."

Martin has been with the Minneapolis Police Department 16 years. Prior to that, he worked as an officer at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. He has a masters degree in police leadership education and administration from the University of St. Thomas, and has worked as a beat officer in the 3rd and 5th precincts (in South Minneapolis).

His past MPD positions included gang unit supervisor, CODEFOR analyst, Minneapolis Strategic Safety Partnership head, special operations division commander and criminal investigation division commander. He and his wife Ann Martin, also an MPD officer with the violent criminal apprehension team, live in New Brighton with their children.

The 4th Precinct inspector job came open after Dolan demoted the former inspector—and his own appointee—Lee Edwards. At the time, media reports said Edwards was disciplined for undesirable conduct, including coming to the station house after he had been drinking.

"The Chief didn't share with me his reasons for removing Lee Edwards," Martin said. "But through my work with the gang unit, a lot of people here know me. It's going to take some time for me to learn the lay of the land and it's hard to balance everything. You have some neighborhoods where their biggest issue is crime, and another where it's traffic.

"My job includes keeping somebody from shooting craps on the sidewalk so somebody else can walk down the sidewalk to buy milk. I think about 5-year old kids who can't play in their own front yard because there are prostitutes and drug dealers on the corner. That's not how it should be around here."

Martin said that before he got this job, he had often said that if he was in charge, drug dealers wouldn't hang out in front of the grocery store a block away from the 4th Precinct building. "So, one thing I said when I first got here was, 'I am absolutely not going to let that happen.' It was almost a joke that it was going on so near here. But it's harder than you'd think to stop it. Some of the people doing it live right behind the store. We've been able to serve some warrants on a few and I haven't seen any activity there lately, but we're still watching."

He added that he has "an initiative that is a creative way to reduce the open air drug market," but at this point, "the details are super secret."

Martin said he is encouraged by the revitalization efforts on West Broadway, including Cub Foods and the City County Federal Credit Union. "Redevelopment is very important. We want people to be able to go to West Broadway and feel safe. The new camera system is up and running. We also want to get out the message: Do not come to the North Side to buy drugs or solicit a prostitute. We'll do everything we can to

make you uncomfortable, whether it's seizing your vehicle or publicizing your arrest."

He said the foreclosure problem is one of the biggest obstacles to public safety that the community faces. "When you drive around and see the boarded up buildings, it looks like people don't care. It's a place where criminals feel comfortable doing their business. It gives them a place to hide. Nobody calls 911 about people loitering in front of an abandoned house. We have to eliminate those, and invest in redevelopment."

Martin said he supports Dolan's focus on juvenile crime, and thinks more needs to be done to get kids on another path. "Obviously, some people choose to be criminals. But I think if some kids have alternatives they wouldn't choose that life. We work closely with the juvenile division on things like truancy and getting kids back in school. We also work on curfew. It's like my dad used to say when we were kids: 'Nothing good happens after 10 o'clock at night.' Kids on the street can either be suspects or victims. They need to know there are boundaries, and that we have community values."

Martin said he enjoys law enforcement. "It's in my blood. It's exciting. You're in the middle of what's going on in the city. You can really make a difference in people's lives and make the neighborhood safer. You assist people who have been victimized. You don't have to sit behind a desk all day. You get to be out in the community. It's a very social job, and I think that's why I enjoy it. Some people say it's dangerous, but we're very well trained and well equipped. You accept the danger as part of the job, but you're also ready for it."

Over time, he added, "you get educated, and you learn from your mistakes. They say good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment. There are lessons you learn from making mistakes. I explain that to the young officers here. Realize when you're wrong and admit you made a mistake. Then make sure it doesn't happen again."

"Many of the cops at this precinct are good, veteran cops who choose to be here. We also have good young officers who want to make a difference. My job is to give them ownership. I want to recruit more good staff, and get officers in the precinct with good leadership skills. I want sergeants leading the officers and proactive officers who don't wait for 911 to tell them what to do."

John Delmonico, president of the Police Officers Federation of Minneapolis, said he has known Martin ever since Martin became a MPD officer. "He took a personal interest in gangs and became the unofficial gang expert at the Minneapolis Police Department. That was early on in his career; he brought our department to the forefront as a gang unit."

"Mike's the kind of guy who will take on a challenge, get the job done and do it right," Delmonico said. "He's a person you're glad to see rise to the top. The bridge disaster gave people a chance to see what he could do. Police work requires getting a collaboration of many different groups. It takes a unique person to bring everyone together."

Martin is well-placed at the 4th Precinct, he added. "It's one of the biggest, toughest precincts facing the officers and their leaders. Mike always is up for a challenge and this time, he got a big one."

Published in the printed version of the NorthNews on October 31, 2007.