



CCR-14

Wichita Ambassadors patrol downtown area

The “Wichita Ambassadors” of Wichita, Kansas (344,000), patrol the streets of the downtown and Old Town areas, greeting residents and visitors, answering questions, and enforcing parking regulations. The ambassadors are trained to help in certain kinds of emergencies and can provide a range of assistance to visitors, residents, and business owners. In particular, ambassadors ticket cars that park illegally in one- and two-hour parking spots, many of which are in front of local businesses.

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Implementation notes

Leadership/staffing The city currently has four Wichita Ambassadors. The ambassadors are supervised by the parks department, paid by the police department, and managed by the city manager’s office.

Timeline The Wichita Ambassadors program began in September 2002. During the spring and summer, the ambassadors patrol the downtown area from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. every weekday and on Saturdays. They also work on Sundays during special events. During the cooler months, the ambassadors patrol between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Budget/funding The Wichita ambassadors are full-time employees who are paid between \$10.50 and \$14 an hour and receive city benefits. The costs of the four new positions are partially offset by the reassignment of two of the police department’s parking control staff members.

Program description The ambassadors undergo 120 hours of intense training in such issues as hospitality and customer service, emergency response, first aid, public transportation, and city services. They know the city well and can direct residents and visitors to cultural sites, stores, and services within and outside the downtown area. The ambassadors wear a casual uniform of golf shirts and twill slacks and drive distinctive vehicles displaying the program’s logo so that they are easy





to recognize. The ambassadors can be dispatched by calls to 911 as well as by calls to the program office. They can take accident reports and may soon be able to place stickers on abandoned cars.

The ambassadors also respond to merchants' concerns about cars illegally parked in front of their stores. Because they patrol each street at least every two hours and are able to give high priority to parking violations, they can monitor and promptly ticket illegally parked cars. This frees up police time and personnel to focus on more serious crimes. The ambassadors first determine, using a special portable computer, whether the driver of an illegally parked vehicle has had any prior parking offenses within the past 180 days. If the driver has no prior violations during that time period, the ambassadors issue a courtesy warning that carries no fine. This program is popular with downtown visitors and enhances the friendliness of both the downtown and the ambassadors. The ambassadors currently spend approximately 60 percent of their time ticketing parking violators. The rest of the time, they respond to questions and concerns and provide tourism and hospitality services at Wichita events.

Results The Wichita Ambassadors are very popular with downtown merchants, who are especially pleased with their rapid response to parking violations. Local parking lots have seen an increase in the purchase of permits, as those who park all day have begun to park in lots rather than on the street. As a result, parking spaces have been freed up for customers of local businesses.