

**WHEN THE FRONT-LINE IS THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE:
THE MIAMI-DADE COUNTY GOODWILL AMBASSADOR PROGRAM**

Jim Norman reports in the online 2016 Gallup Poll article, “Americans' Confidence in Institutions Stays Low” that Americans’ confidence in 14 key United States institutions has fallen to 32 percent and only 56 percent of Americans have “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the police. The report concludes that even though there is more confidence in the economy, Americans are still reluctant to place their faith in core democratic institutions including police. Gary T. Marx, in his 1995 article in *The Encyclopedia of Democracy* titled “Police and Democracy” posits that “police are a central element of a democratic society” but the power they hold “offers great temptations for abuse. Law enforcement requires a delicate balancing act.”

Many agencies are responding to the recent spate of police brutality and misconduct by establishing policies that are intended to regain and strengthen the public’s trust in law enforcement. The Miami-Dade County’s Goodwill Ambassador Program (GWA) is an example of a collaborative volunteer initiative that has been positively received by local law enforcement, policy makers and the community. The GWA program falls under the direction of the Office of Community Advocacy (OCA) which was established to meet Miami Dade County’s unique community needs through various events, initiatives and programs. According to the GWA’s website, in 2002 the sitting members of the Miami-Dade Community Relations Board established the program as a way “to deal with the challenges of large crowds that can sometimes place uniformed law enforcement at odds with residents of a community.”

What makes Miami-Dade County’s Goodwill concept unique is that all 200+ volunteers are County employees. As a condition of employment, each volunteer is pre-vetted, fingerprinted, and must comply with an annual ethics training conducted by the County’s Ethics Commission. Every volunteer must also complete a mandatory annual GWA training program which covers crowd control, customer service, mediation, conflict resolution, and crisis management before deployment.

GWA volunteers are activated whenever the County's Executive Office receives notice from a department or local municipality about a large event such as a parade, demonstration, rally or election which requires the specialized skill set of the Goodwill Ambassadors. The Office of Community Advocacy's website assures that "the County's Executive Office takes great care to use these individuals in a capacity that is comfortable for them and that will help foster goodwill, build community and make peace."

The extensive training and every day, face-to-face contact these front-line employees share with the public proves to be an invaluable asset while volunteering at many of Miami's most culturally dynamic events such as Little Havana's Calle Ocho Festival, Miami Gardens' celebrated Jazz in the Gardens, Homestead's annual Horse & Cattle Show, Little Haiti's Taste of Haiti, Miami Beach's renowned Memorial Day-Urban Beach Week, Music Fest Miami, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the International Conference of Mayors and the Wynnwood Art Walk just to name a few.

James Madison, one of our country's founding fathers and fourth United States president cautioned in his 1778 *Federalist Paper 51*:

But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary...the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.

Madison was highlighting the need for a clear and distinct distribution of power in American politics and was arguably establishing the framework for all administrative operations. One fundamental function of our government is to protect its citizenry. To effectively protect, law enforcement must be considered legitimate and upright. This is not an easy feat nor should it be. As civil servants and protectors of the peace, all law enforcement officers must be held to a higher ethical standard than the average civilian. Miami-Dade County's Goodwill Ambassador concept is a step in the right direction.

This October, the South Florida ASPA chapter will host the 2017 Southeastern Conference for Public Administration "SECoPA 2017: Defending Public Service in a Time of Uncertainty" which will address many of the most pressing issues concerning the study and practice of public administration. Good policing, good policies and good employees are fundamental to a fair and

just society; however, now more than ever, vigilant hiring, training and retention coupled with steadfast ethical practices are crucial to the preservation of our profession.

Volunteer activities such as the Goodwill Ambassador program shape a quality workforce that values cultural diversity, civic participation and community building. Our impact as civil servants is vast and important. In these turbulent times, it is critical to get the message out that we are not only stewards of the public's finances and property but are the vanguards of social equality and good governance.

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