

Citizens' committee formed to study race relations

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INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Police Chief William Pittman formed a citizens' committee last month to study the Nantucket Police Department's race relations.

The committee includes former Nantucket Selectmen Frank Spriggs and Augie Ramos, former Nantucket Park and Recreation Commission committee member Neville Richen, the town's planning assistant Venessa Moore, Nantucket middle school physical education teacher Beau Almodobar, Unitarian minister Rev. Jennifer Brooks, peace activists Mary Jane Halliday and Larry Miller and police officers Jerry Adams, Angus MacVicar, Dan Mack, deputy chief Charles Gibson and Pittman.

Pittman formed the citizens' committee after the release of a 300-page report last month of the department's response to an incident involving seven black youths on Broad Street a year ago.

The incident began when summer special officer Taylor Noll asked a group of seven youths to move to the other side of Broad Street, known as The Strip, because they were blocking foot traffic with their bicycles. The group of boys felt they were being treated differently from the tourist community and later said the officer had used racial slurs. One of the members of the group, Nicholas Phillips, became agitated and began to yell at the officer. Phillips' friends then attempted to pull him away and officer Noll radioed in for backup, but all that was heard by officers at the station was "Broad Street. Now."

The youths fled the scene on their bikes and officers responding to the area pursued the youths not fully

understanding the situation.

Pittman called what followed an "organizational breakdown."

"It just turned out wrong," said Pittman. "It was an overall systemic failure."

Sixteen officers responded to the scene and one of the youths involved was tackled to the ground using an "arm bar takedown" that resulted in his suffering a slightly separated shoulder.

One of the recommendations coming out of that internal investigation was to include diversity training and training on how the police are perceived by "various demographic groups."

While the investigation was completed in March, the findings were not made public until the end of last month.

"It's my own initiative," said Pittman. "Most of the people (asked to be on the committee) have come to me at one time or another with issues. They were open for discussion."

During the first meeting, Pittman distributed the 300-page report to the committee members, who needed a couple of weeks to digest and reflect upon the findings.

Pittman hopes to hold a second meeting of the group before the end of August.

While the first couple of meetings are closed to the press and the public, so the group can get organized and talk freely, there will be a time when the community will be invited to observe the discourse, said Pittman.

"Some of the individuals on the committee would like to see the community involved," said Pittman. "If the format works, it might be a broader springboard for the community. Realistically, we are still forming and trying to figure out our goals to reach our own initiative." ■

MEDFLIGHT

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Hospital, Children's Hospital, Massachusetts General Hospital, and Tufts Medical Center-but the organization also seeks private donations to help offset losses.

Providing emergency services to Nantucket is not only a financial hardship for Boston MedFlight, but the challenges of landing on an island known for fog can be a logistical hardship as well.

"There is nothing better than coming down for a landing and seeing those lights on the runway," said Derek Gregory, who is a pilot for Boston Medflight's fixed wing jet.

Gregory said the jet is often called in to come to Nantucket when weather conditions prohibit one of Boston Medflight's three helicopters from landing at Nantucket Cottage Hospital.

"As long as we have about a half-a-mile of visibility, we can land," said Gregory. "It's a great airport to land at in bad conditions, but sometimes I wish I was able to come to Nantucket when the weather is nice."

Coming to Nantucket under nice conditions, not including the weather, is not something Boston MedFlight is known to do.

"The main reasons we come here are for cardiac and trauma-related problems," said flight nurse Greg Schneider. "In the summer, we're here almost every day."

Schneider also spoke of the famous Nantucket fog, but from a standpoint different from a pilot. Often they do not know if they will be able to land at the hospital until they are only 250 feet above it, when they look to see if the lights on the landing pad are visible.

"It's frustrating," said Schneider. "You want to be able to come out here and help in any way you can, but there are certain limitations and we just have to be able to work within those limitations." ■

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