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Former Police Department Leaders Support Funkhouser for Mayor

The Kansas City Police Department announced yesterday that, for the first time since 2002, it improved the homicide clearance rate last year. Former KCPD leaders agree that Mark Funkhouser's work over the past 13 years has helped the Department adapt to change and face head-on the challenge of making Kansas City safer.

"I think the influence he had on the police department will make this a better police department in the years to come," says George Roberts, a former Kansas City Police Department Deputy Chief who retired last December after 30 years on the job. "It already has."

Through its work with Funkhouser, the Police Department has come to embrace the concepts of accountability and transparency, Roberts and other former leaders say.

"He taught the department that legitimate measurement of performance was the only way they were going to get any better," says Jeffrey J. Simon, former President of the Board of Police Commissioners.

In 1993, a new state law was passed to allow Funkhouser to audit the Police Department.

"I was anxious to audit the Police Department, because it was apparent to me that violent crime was a big problem in Kansas City in the 80's and early 90's," says Funkhouser. "It was an intolerable situation that had to be improved."

Even after the new law was passed, the Police Department, which is controlled by the state, was at first reluctant to allow City Auditor Funkhouser full access to its operations. "The ideology was 'the more we open the police department to Mark the more he's going to want to run the police department,'" Deputy Chief Roberts says. "We finally realized Mark was not an enemy, and he could help us do the right thing in addressing what was going on in the community."

In one of his first audits of the Department, Funkhouser addressed a critical issue: response times to 911 calls. Before the audit, the Department did not even measure average response times to such calls. "As a direct result of his work, police department patrol boundaries were realigned," Simon says. "That put more officers in the parts of town where crime was occurring. Response times improved, and the police department worked better."

More recently, Funkhouser audited the department's community complaint system. His audit and follow up became important tools for former Police Commissioner Javier M. Perez Jr. "It helped me as a Board member hold the department more accountable for community complaints," Perez

says. “It was a cordial situation, non confrontational and yet Funkhouser was able to get things done. I know the entire Board always found his audits insightful and useful.”

Roberts says Funkhouser’s audits and advice played an important role in building the department’s Blueprint for the Future, which is the Department’s strategic plan, developed after over 18 months of intensive study and analysis of the Department itself and Kansas City’s public safety needs. Before he retired, Roberts was responsible for implementing the Blueprint department-wide.

The Blueprint calls for performance measures for every officer in every section of the department, from traffic patrol to detectives. It gives the department a way to measure how good a job it’s doing and compare its own performance year-to-year.

“The Blueprint for change goes right to the meat of what Mark’s been saying for years,” Roberts says. “It’s not the number of policemen you have but how you use those policemen and hold them accountable.”

The measurements come down to numbers, but they are numbers that matter, Roberts says. “When people call the police, they want somebody coming. They want them quick. And they deserve that.”

Response times have dropped. And last year, detectives solved 64 percent of the city’s homicides, the first increase since 2002.

Roberts says Funkhouser’s relationship with the department sets him apart from the other candidates for mayor. “If you were to ask the other candidates what the Blueprint for the Future was, I don’t think any of them could tell you.”

Funkhouser, of course, could. In a way, he helped write it.

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