

Campus police a 'dual agency'

By SARAH OATES
Staff Writer

Yes, in keeping with popular belief, the University Police devote a lot of time to writing tickets and arranging to tow illegally parked cars.

But that's only a fraction of their duties. "A lot of people think we're only here to enforce the parking regulations," said Mike Ragan, assistant chief of the University Police Department.

"They forget that we're here to enforce the law. A lot of them don't realize that we make arrests." Ragan described the department as "a dual agency — part law enforcement and part service."

The service aspect is most visible to the Texas A&M University community. Officers often spend their days patrolling the campus, jump-starting cars, rescuing students who have locked their keys in their cars and doing building checks.

This may seem like quiet, even dull work, but the department wants to keep it that way.

"We do emphasize service," said Bob Wiatt, director of security and traffic for the University Police Department, "but law enforcement gets the biggest play."

We have a sort of ambiguous appearance. It depends on who you talk to. If that person has been the recipient of service, we're the good guys. If it's law enforcement, we're the bad guys."

The Department's service record is impressive. Since September 1983 its officers have made 40,000 building security checks and answered 1400 calls to assist motorists.

Officers also are available at night to escort people to their cars or

dorms. In the past year, 11 of these escorts were provided.

Violent crime is low at A&M. No rapes, murders or robberies have been reported in the few years. But property thefts are primarily as a result of carelessness, a big problem.

"In this day and age, this community is no different from a city," Wiatt said.

From September 1983 to 1984, \$290,237 worth of property was stolen at Texas A&M. Right now the recovery rate for stolen property is about 35 percent.

University Police Department officials agree that late reporting of thefts hampers recovery of property.

"Delayed reporting is totally less," Wiatt said.

Officers are available to speak to dorm residents and students on matters about security and awareness.

Wiatt, who speaks to all incoming faculty and freshmen in the fall, said he also is available to speak to students living off campus.

The department, which employs 48 certified police officers, 14 parking patrol officers, also has a detective bureau to conduct investigations and serve arrest warrants.

The parking patrol officers issue parking tickets and arrange for illegally parked cars.

The department recently cracked down on bicycle violations, issuing an average of 20 tickets per month since the beginning of the summer. Wiatt said the common violations made by bicyclists are ignoring stop signs and stopping for pedestrians. Bicyclists are subject to the same traffic parking rules as motor vehicles.

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