

POLICING

the party precinct

“The whole concept of a special entertainment precinct like the Valley is unique,” Inspector Brent Carter said.

“We are moving with the public, the property owners the venue licensees, the security providers and the residents of Fortitude Valley into challenging and exciting new territory,” he said.

Inspector Carter took on the role of Queensland Police Patrol Services Inspector in February last year about the same time that Brisbane City Council formally identified Fortitude Valley as an entertainment precinct.

The task of policing this vibrant combination of nightclubs, bars and entertainment venues has required the Police Service to demonstrate a high degree of adaptability.

Curiously the first step into this social experiment was a return to a fundamental premise of policing – walking the beat.

“We found that high-visibility policing worked best in an environment where literally thousands of people were converging on one specific area for discrete time periods,” he said.

“The public find the sight of frequent police patrols reassuring and they are encouraged to approach the officers to further build that rapport.”

The challenge for police on the Valley Beat was to maintain that strong presence without creating an oppressive mood in an environment virtually dependent on a recreational atmosphere.

The answer lay with the officers themselves – getting to know the local business operators and making themselves part of the feel-good environment.

“Our officers routinely enter entertainment venues – walk through the crowds and say ‘Giddy’,” said Inspector Carter.

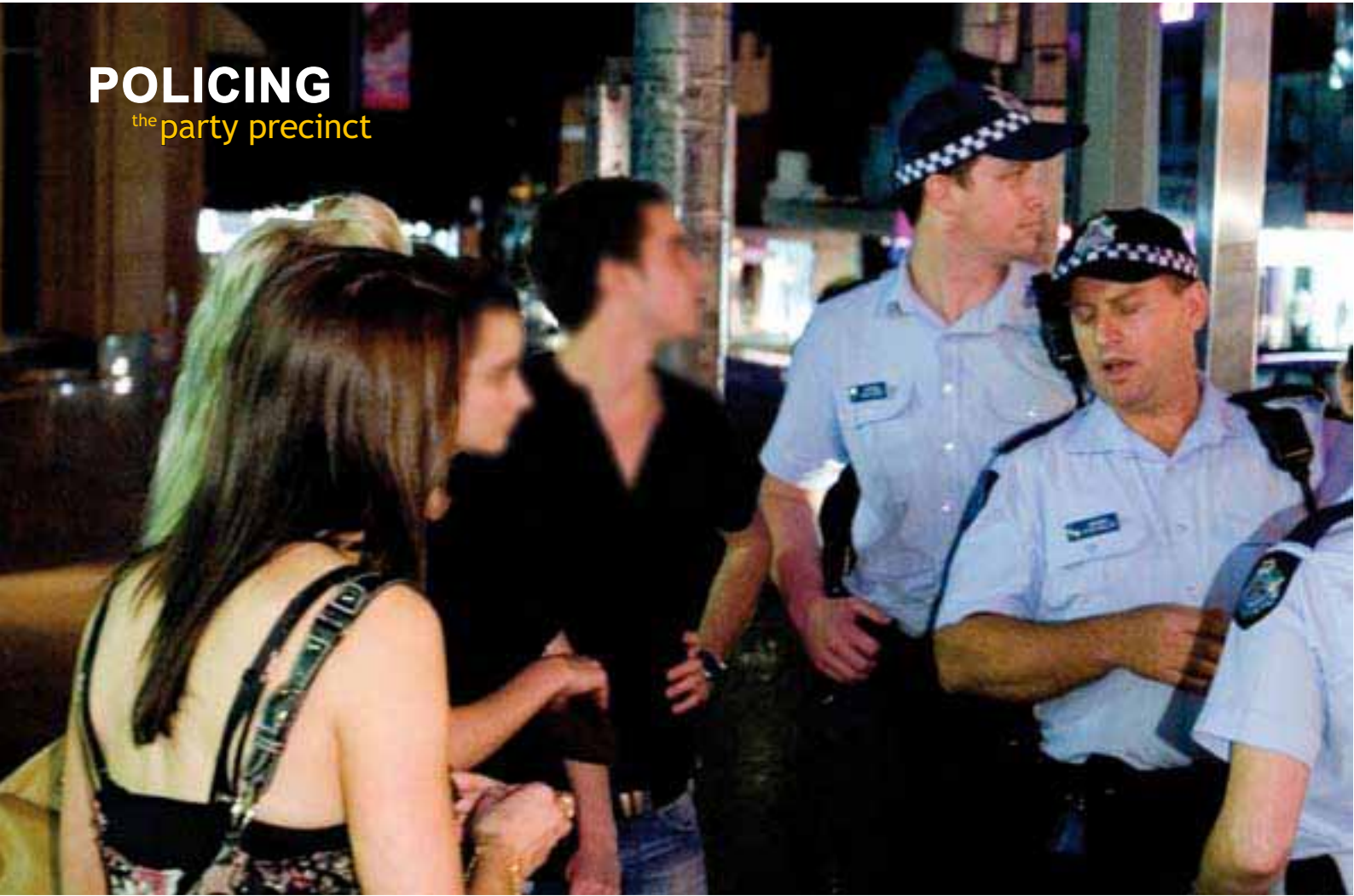
But they don’t trivialise the emerging issue of public safety and good order that accompanies the ever-increasing swell of humanity making The Valley their recreational venue of choice.

“While officers keep that light-hearted feel they are quick to respond to any concerns the public may have,” he said.

“By interacting with the community we not only identify regular patrons

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“...we have a clear commitment to keeping the Valley a safe and enjoyable place to visit...”

and business operators but we also know those who are likely to cause trouble.”

Police on the ground are certainly not alone.

There are security providers and venue staff working with them to maintain the welfare of visitors and their observations are further supported by the Brisbane City Council City Safe cameras.

“Overall we are very happy with our clear-up rate when offences unfortunately do occur – it’s important that the public knows we are also there to bring offenders to justice and provide a high level of public safety and a strong sense of security in the precinct environment.”

The Valley precinct can also draw on a wealth of specialist police services to target specific enforcement issues.

Local police regularly include the services of the Public Safety

Response Team, the Railway Squad, State Drug Enforcement and Prostitution Units.

“We like to see this as another opportunity to demonstrate the versatility of the Police Service and remind the public that we have a clear commitment to keeping the Valley a safe and enjoyable place to visit,” said Inspector Carter.

It is expected that continued growth in the popularity of the Valley will see police with an ongoing expectation to meet and deal with demand for their services.

“It was recently estimated that 50,000 people visited the Valley on one weekend,” said Inspector Carter.

“With the anticipated opening of another major entertainment venue in the near future, applications in the pipeline for several more venues and a lifting of height restrictions on existing sites it is certain the number of visitors will continue to increase.”

Meanwhile police continue to answer the call at a number of established events on the Valley’s social calendar.

New Farm Park is proving an increasingly popular venue for day-time activities while the 10 days of the RNA Show, The Ekka are an occasion for police to interact with the community on an unprecedented scale.

“The vast majority of visitors to the Ekka have had no contact whatsoever with police throughout the year,” Inspector Carter said, “They arrive at the show keen to see and try new things and it’s the perfect opportunity for us to introduce ourselves to a receptive audience in a relaxed environment.”

The Valley Fiesta is a later but equally well established event on the calendar where police again have the opportunity to build confidence and trust with a diverse kaleidoscope of the population.



What hasn't changed dramatically in the Valley – and it's probably the only thing – is the resident population.

"Census data suggests that, despite a growth in inner city dwellings, the number of permanent residents in the city CBD and Valley remains quite small," said Inspector Carter.

What that means to the future of policing in the Valley is that officers will always be welcoming newcomers to their precinct.

"The job of building good will, mutual respect and trust will never lessen," said Inspector Carter, "and the challenge of keeping pace with the Valley's evolving profile will remain a core responsibility. I know we can do this as the Valley has strong and highly motivated group of officers to face up to this dynamic environment".



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Community Safety Committee and Brisbane City Council to hold six monthly safety audits of the Entertainment Precinct," said Valley Chamber of Commerce President Carol Gordon.

"Many people in the community are openly commenting on the results of these audits and the many subtle changes that are being addressed to ensure a safer environment for all," said Ms Gordon.

"Using the crime prevention through environmental design model, residents, business owners, community organisations, council malls management, safety officers from council and local politicians and media were all accompanied through the Valley at varying times of day and night by Inspector Brent Carter and the Valley Police to conduct the lighting and safety audit."

The Valley Community Safety Group has been in existence since 2000 and is chaired by former Chamber President and local businessman, Geoff Dick.

The Safety Group has proved an invaluable community resource for individuals to express any community or policing safety concerns. During this time the Valley Police have always been a major supporter and participant in the many safety initiatives that have been achieved.

"I would like to thank our local police on behalf of the whole Valley community and the millions of visitors and party goers that visit the Valley each year," said Ms Gordon.

"The last audit was held between 1.00am and 3.00am early Sunday so that everyone participating had a true appreciation of the reality and perception issues that occur after a regular Saturday party night in the Valley.

"Brisbane City Council collated the results in collaborative approach with the police and the Valley Chamber to ensure as many of the problems areas as possible are rectified.

Safety audits

Walk a mall in my shoes

The Queensland State Government and Brisbane City Council jointly announced the Fortitude Valley area in Brisbane as Australia's first officially designated Entertainment Precinct on July 1, 2006.

It followed changes to five acts of State Parliament and three council by-laws as well as exhaustive consultation about the Valley Local Harmony Plan

before the Entertainment Precinct came into being.

The Valley Chamber of Commerce has applauded the cooperative approach adopted by the Valley Police Station and the newly constructed Police Beat premises located in the heart of the Valley Entertainment Precinct.

"This is nowhere better reflected than the Valley Police working extensively with our Valley



Constable Jo Wright has worked most of her four years in the Queensland Police Service in Fortitude Valley and she says she wouldn't swap it for anywhere else.

Beat police up to challenge

That's not because it's a breeze – far from it.

"I joined up to experience a real policing environment," Constable Wright said.

It is a community in microcosm with crowds getting bigger and more diverse as time goes by.

"There is a very big component of young night clubbers but with the opening of more businesses and restaurants there's a growing number of older and professional

people making the Valley their preferred venue," she said.

"There's also a diverse ethnic population with the Chinese and Indigenous communities strongly represented and, more recently, a cross-section of itinerant backpackers coming to see the sights."

Constable Kade Pepper is also a fan of the Valley policing environment where he has served for three years.

"It is exciting – there's always something going on," he said.

"There's a real rapport and camaraderie among the police in the Valley thanks largely to team rostering which allows you to work with the same people."

Constable Pepper says the excitement hasn't worn off despite the demands of the job.

"There are some people here who've been working six or seven years – you don't stay around that long if you don't enjoy it."