

MARKETWISE

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"Putting The Neighbor Back In The Hood"

KOBAN, Inc. - Columbia, SC

A Japanese term meaning "mini-station," the word "KOBAN" has traveled 7,000 miles to Columbia, a South Carolina city of over 103,000 people, with powerful consequences. In the early 1980s, the Eisenhower Foundation traveled to Japan with 13 police chiefs to learn more about effective law enforcement programs from the country that boasts the world's lowest crime rate. In their travels, they discovered KOBANs - approximately 15,000 of them spread throughout the country. Whatever a KOBAN was, it seemed to be working. As a community-policing program that brings about positive change using proactive methods by both police and civilians and creates a 'safe haven' for youths, KOBANs are breaking through cultural and geographic barriers to become a universal crime deterrent model.

To deal with the causes of crime, as opposed to the effects, three public housing developments (and two future residential sites) in Columbia have created KOBANs to provide an on-site innovative community-based police effort; an effort that is working for the community by working against crime. As one of eight new KOBAN sites in the United States funded by the Eisenhower Foundation, Columbia KOBAN was founded September 1995, and KOBAN, Inc. was formed on August 1, 1997, and is the first stand-alone organization under the KOBAN concept. Jerome Cardwell is the Executive Director of KOBAN, Inc. in Columbia and says that the success of the program is "no magic formula: it's that somebody cares."

Learning that Cardwell is a retired Army drill sergeant raises some expectations and deservedly so. His friendly voice resonates with the unmistakable undertones of discipline and authority and is one that both demands and reciprocates respect. He sees the KOBAN youths as the 'same children' that he led and trained in the military - only younger. They too need his support and leadership to learn the basics: things like socializing with others, overcoming adversity; and realizing their potential. Cardwell views the youths as individuals, each a "personal

goal," and not just a professional responsibility. In the military world, drill sergeants strive to graduate the same number they pick up initially in their unit; in the KOBAN world, the program directors do the same.

The public housing developments of Gonzales Gardens, Saxon Homes, and Hendley Homes all have directors with a military or law enforcement background. Though not a formal prerequisite prior to assuming a KOBAN director position, KOBAN, Inc. has found these types of backgrounds make sense since the director is the bridge connecting the community needs with the city's resources. Both the site directors and the assigned police officers serve as male role models, neighbors, friends, and mentors to the youth, as a large percentage of the households are female-headed in these communities. Additionally, the strong presence and high visibility of police officers serve to address early signs of delinquent or criminal behavior and provide quick responses to emergencies in those KOBAN communities that are plagued by high crime, delinquency, and drug and alcohol abuse.

The support of the Columbia Housing Authority and the Columbia Police are major determinants in the strength and growth of KOBAN, Inc. Cardwell attributes much of the program's success to the dedication of manpower and resources from these partners. Columbia Police Chief Charles Austin, a minister and "modern day saint" according to Cardwell, views KOBAN as "more than a crime tool." Austin believes the KOBANs provide community residents "a place to turn for a variety of resources outside traditional law enforcement concerns." This requires that all directors possess the "essentials" according to Austin: a strong value system, a caring spirit, patience, and kindness in dealing with diversity. His belief in the program is evidenced by his embodiment of all these same traits and his extensive personal involvement; he also serves as the Co-chair of the Eisenhower Foundation Trustee board and as Chair of the KOBAN Committee. The decrease in Columbia's crime rate has been largely attributed to Austin's leadership and the force's continued emphasis on the KOBAN programs; recent statistics for 1998 show an overall 4 percent drop in crime. Contributing to this five-year low in the crime rate are the KOBAN sites in Columbia, all of which have experienced significant crime reduction due to the community-policing and youth program efforts. Consequently, the "spill over effect" has proven strong enough to encompass the broader community. Austin remains "cautiously optimistic" when it comes to statistics, but is "most encouraged by the improvement of the overall quality of life in the KOBAN communities."

To both Cardwell and Austin, it's more about souls than statistics. Years of mentoring, tutoring, attention, and respect have added up to a whole lot of saved souls and changed lives; the KOBAN program has increased school attendance, honor roll numbers, and student employment rates while it has

decreased teen pregnancies and school disciplinary actions. Also, there is marked improvement of youth attitude, appearance, behavior, and morale. It is the "good feeling impact" that Austin says has the power to outweigh the tangible measurements. He modestly describes himself as "a servant who feels blessed to have been chosen," and feels it is his obligation to do the best he can do.

He and others in the law enforcement and government arenas recognize the effectiveness of the preventive and proactive methods that are unique to the KOBAN. The KOBAN provides a constructive diversion for the youth in the community, aged six to eighteen, through after-school tutorials; mentor, reading, and sports programs; scout and teen clubs; and police-related activities. These activities, along with the officers' investment of time and energy, ensure that the lines of communication stay open and that youth involvement stays strong. Officer interest in the program has been overwhelming; to date, placements have been filled based on officer request alone. As with all police specialized assignments in Columbia, an evaluation is conducted every two years to determine if officer rotation is needed.

As one of almost a dozen cities in the United States with a KOBAN program (and one of the few to open multiple stations, Columbia is a "very innovative player" according to Eddie Banks, Director of Youth Investment and Police Mentoring for the Eisenhower Foundation. KOBAN cities are chosen by the Foundation based on the "necessary ingredients," which include sincere support, commitment, and resources from the police department (two full-time officers per site), and strong area youth and housing agencies. The success of KOBAN, Inc. proves the perfect recipe; it is a valuable model for the Foundation, specifically in the holistic approach and implementation of the program. Banks says it is quite obvious that Columbia is a city that "wants more KOBANs; they are a city that is changing the face of crime-fighting efforts."

He feels that Columbia's aggressive and inclusive approach has encouraged strong civilian and community commitment in the KOBAN program with involvement and participation by the area hospitals, colleges, and volunteers. Plans are also underway to integrate the KOBAN program into the school system, especially benefiting those students likely to receive probation or suspension who would otherwise spend this disciplinary time away from school destructively. With such extensive community involvement, KOBAN, Inc. is taking the program to new heights with limitless possibilities.

Gaining community support and partners is also important to KOBANs from a funding standpoint, as the Foundation's initial funding for a KOBAN expires after thirty-six months. At that time, an outside

evaluation is conducted to rate the success of the program. Ideally, funding will continue by the city or will be covered under a 501(c)(3) umbrella (nonprofit status). The Foundation does provide long-term technical assistance to KOBANs and documents and publishes the specific and proven approaches and strategies for the benefit of other communities both nationally and internationally (*see Editor's Note*).

KOBAN, Inc. is emerging as a KOBAN revolutionary and as one of the strongest models to date in program development, expansion, and success. With goals set at 100 percent youth and family participation, 85 percent increased economic stability during an eighteen-month period, and 30 percent crime reduction, the numbers game is an important one for the KOBAN communities of Columbia to win. The communities agree - and experience tells them that teaming up with the men in blue gives them a definite home court advantage.

But every team has its star players. Each of the Columbia KOBANs boasts a "Wall of Fame" that proudly displays pictures of these key players - the community children who accomplish great things in school or otherwise. Their personal development and achievements speak to the effectiveness of KOBAN, Inc. The "Wall of Fame" reinforces the opportunities for success that lie beyond their neighborhoods by putting familiar faces to extraordinary feats. The children see their peers on the wall and know that they too, using KOBAN as their coach and compass, have the power to choose the direction of their life instead of letting it be chosen for them. This way, they are guaranteed a win.

- Patty Frost

Editor's Note:

In February 1998, the Eisenhower Foundation published a report ten years in the making recommending the policy of "community equity policing" based on the statistically significant findings of crime reduction in those areas implementing variations of the "safe haven" concept. This proposed new national policy partners community organizations with the police to provide safe havens for youths, especially during the after-school and summer hours since most single-heads of households are employed full-time and do not have child care arrangements for these times.

For more information on the report (entitled *Youth Investment and Police Mentoring*) or the Eisenhower Foundation, please contact:

Lynn Curtis

(202) 439-0440

or

David Lerner, Riptide Communications

(212) 260-5000

In a day-long trip sponsored by the South Carolina AFL-CIO last May, Richmond Fed President Al Broaddus had an opportunity to visit a KOBAN site in Columbia, South Carolina. His day began at eight a.m. at Hendley Homes in Columbia, where he toured the KOBAN with Kevin Reese, Columbia Police Officer; Jerome Cardwell, Executive Director, KOBAN, Inc.; and Rodney Fauser, Executive Director of Public Housing.

The visit provided Mr. Broaddus a firsthand look at the community policing efforts that have turned Columbia youth into responsible citizens, virtual strangers into involved community members, and housing projects into true neighborhoods. Mr. Broaddus found the KOBAN program "particularly appealing because it successfully tackles three important issues: crime reduction, education of our youth (especially in much needed automation skills), and making our communities better places to live." The visit also gave the working partners of this program an opportunity to share their community concerns and successes with the Fed President personally.

Mr. Broaddus remains informed of the KOBAN program and other community development plans in South Carolina through Gilda Cobb-Hunter, Executive Director, CASA/Family Systems and Donna S. DeWitt, President of the South Carolina AFL-CIO. Both currently serve on the Richmond Fed's Community Development Advisory Council to voice relevant community information that will assist the Fed in serving the public interest more effectively.