Columbia Capers

Officer helps found camp, receives national award

By Phoebe L. Ross

"You know we have heard about police very harshly [illegible] policemen — [illegible] cops, they hate us.

They feel that they are in some cases unjustly treated, perhaps in some cases they are and in others they are not, but when you stop to think about it, how could we survive if there were no policemen to enforce the law and to call on in time of need.

Some of the youth in Howard County most certainly would argue that point in reference to "those cops hate us cops," because of their experience at Camp Beartrax.

Police Officer, Frank Dawson, a 29-year-old handsome policeman is responsible for some of the youth's attitudes that changed toward the policemen in Howard County.

The idea of Camp Beartrax came about in 1978 at a unit meeting" said Officer Dawson. It was discussed and he submitted a proposal to Chief of Police Paul H. Reasoner in January 1979. The Chief gave him his approval to move forward with the project.

The idea for a camp arose out of problems he saw developing between the youth of Howard County and the police.

After some research in other areas of the county to solve the problem, he came up with the idea for the operation of Camp Beartrax.

The purpose of the camp is to increase and develop a positive relationship between the youth of Howard County and the police officers, not only to show that they are friends, but to develop police interest in the youth.

I wanted to know from the eight year police veteran why the name Beartrax?

"There were many names tossed around in their meeting, but Officer B. Ajax thought of a name that would be catchy, another came up with using the name Bear, because it was a CB slang term for police officers, still another officer came up with the word Trax-meaning footsteps of the police officers.

After establishing a name for the camp, the officers went out into the community to various civic organizations, groups, fraternities, sororities, business and PTAs requesting donations to sponsor youth into the camp.

The fee to sponsor one child was sixty dollars the first year. The second year it cost a sponsor one

Officer Frank Dawson
National Awardee

hundred dollars. The first year there were donations enough to send 40 boys and 20 girls to camp Beartrax. It was the first time in the history that a police summer camp was established on a co-ed basis.

To attend the camp, a child must meet certain criteria. He must be between the ages of 9-12, a resident of Howard County and physically fit.

All must be able to pass a medical examination; in addition, they must be either enrolled in a youth division program, demonstrate a need for emotional support, come from a family that's financially deprived, be a child from a single parent family, or be recommended by a Howard County police officer.

According to Officer Dawson, conceivably any Howard County child could attend the camp. He gave an example of a young youth from Columbia attending the camp whose parents were financially able. Her parents owned their own home and had a business.

The camper had a sister and brother attending college, but after having all of the luxuries, there was something missing. The child had no adult image because her mother and father ran their business and did not have the adequate time to spend with their daughter.

This summer a slight change came about, the camp was labored under the police youth program. It was lengthened to five days, their enrollment was 96 boys and girls, and they raised twelve thousand dollars from the community.

"It worked," stated the 6 foot 4 inch soft spoken police officer. "A relationship was established between the kids who attended our camp and our police officers who volunteered their time. After the week was over the campers didn't want to leave, some of the kids went away crying."

Officer Dawson's honor

It all began when Captain Burk was contacted by the Chief of Police, saying that Dawson's name was going to be submitted as a nominee.

When this was told to Dawson, he said, "I just passed it off and said OK captain, it's just another one of those things he is doing," stretching his long legs and crossing them with a big grin on his face. "I didn't even expect to be recognized or get a letter back, I was notified that I was one of the honorable mention awards."

"There were 450,000 officers in the country nominated, each Chief of Police was asked to submit a nominee, how many did I just don't know, but I can say I was very lucky." He was one out of eleven across the country selected for the honor.

The young officer said when he accepted the award in St. Louis at the International Association of Chiefs of Police Convention. "I accepted it on behalf of the county and the citizens in it."

Giving credit to all of his fellow officers for their volunteer help with the Camp and, helping with the initial stages of it. "If it weren't for the citizens in the community and their donations, it just would not have happened," he said.

Officer Dawson received the national award for the creation of Operation Beartrax, a co-ed youth camp.

"It's one thing," said Officer Dawson, "that makes Camp Beartrax very unique is that they have no individual competitions. The kids they take to camp have very little self-image or self-concept and very low self-esteem.

"Each child receives a Beartrax shirt, a certificate, and the arts and crafts they have made.

The camp does not only cover just the summer camp. The kids were taken to Hershey Park, they were provided a Christmas party, and they just recently were taken to the Civic Center to see the Shrine Circus.

Officer Dawson, along with three other officers, works in the school doing a school program. The purpose of the school program is to increase the police-youth relationship and understanding that youth have about police officers.

Courses offered are law related ones in the schools and have been condoned by the Board of Education. The middle school students are taught things such as what kind of trouble you can get into for shoplifting, what actually is law, and why do police officers do certain things.

The eighth grade children learn some of the things officers learn in the Police Academy, in police reports, and about testifying in court, and evidence. This lasts for 12 weeks.

If you walk into the cafeteria during lunch hour, there would be little difference between Officer Dawson and the students. He wears sports cloths, jeans and shirts, sometimes a uniform. He wants the kids to see him as a person.

Officer Dawson has received numerous citations and awards from organizations for his great works with the kids here in Howard County.

He has gotten a tremendous amount of recognition for his outstanding achievement from making the national news. People and kids stop him everywhere he goes. He said "I hope this program will prosper in spite of the recognition I am receiving."

Who is Frank Dawson?

Officer Dawson is the son of Frank Dawson Sr. They hailed to Columbia from the windy city of Chicago just about twelve years ago, about the time of the birth of Columbia.

His father was transferred by the federal government to the Department of Labor headquarters in Washington, D.C.

His beautiful mother, Gloria, taught chemistry in the Howard County school system and was a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. She passed away a few years ago. His father is a Kappa.

Frank Dawson is a scholar, having attended college at Indiana University, University of Maryland, Bowie State, and The Catholic University.

He has a BS degree in Air Space Engineering and Psychology, and a master's degree in political science.

I asked Officer Dawson why he decided to go into law enforcement. "I wanted to go to law school. I knew that the federal government subsidized education with police officers. I needed a job at that time, and the department was hiring. I had had a little trouble with the police and decided not to try to fight them but join them."

He has been on the force since 1973 working as a patrol officer, after which he was chosen to work in the newly established Youth Department because of his interest in youth.

Officer Dawson is a quiet person seeming to be a bit shy but had firm answers to my questions.

During his high school days in Chicago he was active in black power and revolution. He said he hated cops like most of his friends.

As he looked back over his past years, most of his old high school friends are in jail. "Columbia is the best move my parents could have made," he said.

He said he does not see children as color any more, they all have the same needs. They need to be shown affection and adult role model. They need to know that they are trusted. "All of those things we hope to accomplish at Camp Beartrax," he stated.

Officer Dawson has two brothers, Ralph, 26, a graduate of the University of Maryland and Bryan 20, a student at Howard Community College.

He is married to Joy Webstone Dorsey, a native of Michigan. She is an attorney for the U.S. Government.

They are the proud parents of two children; three-year-old Frank III and 10-month-old [illegible] Brian.

AKA

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daughters were presented.

Each honoree received a certificate of honor and a gift. Some of the former 128 honorees were present and were recognized.

There were exhibits on display which had been done by Kimberly Kelly (art) Carol Frances Smith (string Art), Veronica E. Tates and Beth White, who had done fashion illustrations.

AKA honorees for 1980 were: Fannie C. Anderson, Harnetha M. Black, Rhonda M. Bradaher, Nancy L. Burkett, Kathy Frances Crosby, Allison E. Davis, Shawn Connie Fabre, Karen L. Giles, Cheryl L. Griffin and Dyetra D. Griffin.

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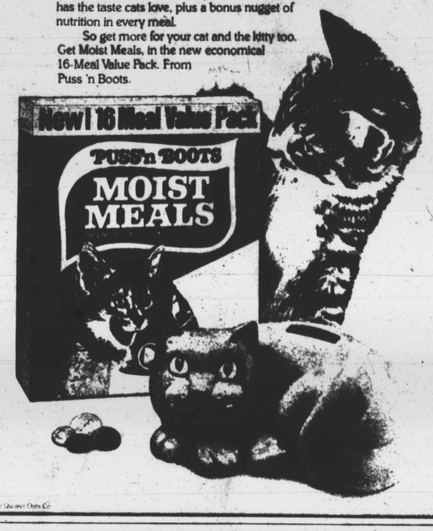

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