

**Sanford Blue Ribbon Panel
Police Department/Community Relations Assessment Report**

**Prepared for:
The City of Sanford, Florida
Norton N. Bonaparte Jr., City Manager**

**Co-Chairs:
The Honorable O.H. Eaton Jr.
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**Blue Ribbon Panel on Police Community Relations
With Support from the City of Sanford**

**Facilitator of the Blue Ribbon Panel:
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June 4, 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BRIEF BACKGROUND	3
COMPOSITION OF THE PANEL.....	3-4
MISSION OF THE PANEL.....	4
THE PANEL'S TASK	4-5
THE PANEL'S EXAMINATION	5-6
COMMENDATIONS	6
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	7-14
FUNDING	7
POLICE PRACTICES	7-9
TRAINING	10
MANAGEMENT.....	10-11
REPORTING OF CRIME	11-12
RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY	12-14
FUTURE EXPECTATIONS	15

Sanford's Blue Ribbon Panel's Report

June 4, 2013

Brief Background:

On February 26, 2012, Trayvon Martin was shot and killed. There was no immediate arrest, although there was a suspect, George Zimmerman, who admitted the shooting but claimed self-defense. The government's timeline in responding to the shooting was perceived by many to be racially motivated. The incident attracted the interest of religious organizations, social justice activists, civil right leaders, and law enforcement oversight groups around the country. Social unrest followed, resulting in social activism and the issuance of a list of demands to the City. There were rallies demanding the arrest of George Zimmerman which were attended by citizens of Sanford and people from elsewhere. There was a barrage of media attention.

As more time passed without an arrest, members of the African American community reflected on their already strained relationship with the Sanford Police Department. Citizens demanded a dialog about the Sanford Police Department and the City of Sanford responded with a Nine Point plan that included the formation of a Blue Ribbon Panel of citizens tasked with studying police-community relations and making recommendations for improving the situation.

The City's Nine Point Plan included the following action:

1. Request the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division conduct a Patterns and Practice investigation into current practices within the SPD.
2. Create an Office of Community Relations.
3. Require the Director of Human Relations to follow up on Plan.
4. Establish a Police-Community Relations Blue Ribbon Panel.
5. Establish an Inter-racial Interfaith Alliance.
6. Create a Task force for an Anti-Violence Campaign.
7. Establish a Sanford Neighborhood Action Partnership (Neighbors Building Neighborhoods.)
8. Utilize the Department of Justice Community Relations Services for consulting and training.
9. Provide Youth Training and Employment Opportunities.

Composition of the Panel:

The Blue Ribbon Panel was to consist of approximately 25 members representing a broad cross section of the community. The Co-Chairs were appointed by the City Manager. The members selected to serve on the Panel were identified as follows:

Mayor and Commissioners (two members each).....	10
Urban League of Central Florida	1
NAACP	1
Interfaith Ministers Alliance	3
Sanford Chamber	1
Seminole County Bar	1

Seminole County Public School District.....	1
Seminole State College Criminal Justice Institute.....	1
Citizens' Advisory Board.....	2
Sanford Women's Club.....	1
Judiciary.....	1
Fraternal Order of Police.....	1
Hispanic Leadership.....	1
TOTAL.....	25

The Fraternal Order of Police after several attempts was unable to find a representative to serve on the Panel. Also due to health reasons the representative from Seminole State College had to drop off the Panel within the first month.

Mission of the Panel:

In December of 2012 the Blue Ribbon Panel was given the following mission from the City of Sanford (hereinafter "The City"):

To assess the community's perception of the (Sanford Police) Department's ability to carry out its primary function to serve and protect the public as a whole and to identify strategies to transform the image of police-community relations in the City of Sanford from negative to positive and from insular to collaborative. To accomplish the purpose the Panel will be reviewing the following areas such as but not limited to:

- Mission, Vision and Values
- Code of Conduct
- Department structure
- Community Policing philosophy and approach
- Police -Community relations philosophy
- Community partnerships
- Crime prevention initiatives
- Recruitment, training and promotion
- Complaint process
- External Citizen's
- Internal Administrative
- Investigative Procedures
- Role and function of the Citizens' Advisory Board
- Discipline Procedure

The Panel's Task:

The Blue Ribbon Panel, as part of the Nine Point Plan, was tasked with developing the following:

- Strategies to **strengthen relationships** with the community based on inclusion, trust and mutual respect for each other's roles and responsibilities,

- Strategies to **promote and practice the use of effective communication** that crosses racial, cultural and ethnic barriers,
- Strategies to create a **shared vision and common commitment** to community policing and crime prevention.

The Panel's Examination:

- A. Over the course of many meetings and several months, the following members of the City staff and the Sanford Police Department made presentations to the Panel:
- Norton Bonaparte, City Manager
 - Lonnie Groot, City Attorney
 - Richard Myers, Interim Chief of Police
 - Cecil Smith, Chief of Police
 - Captain Darren Scott, SPD (operations, crime in Sanford)
 - Captain Jim McAuliffe, SPD (Community Policing and operations)
 - Captain Bob O'Connor, SPD (re Diversified Services Division including investigations and support services)
 - Mr. Jim Krzenski, SPD (business side of SPD including budget, records and accreditation)
 - Sgt. Anthony Raimondo, SPD (demographics, chain of command and training)
 - Sgt. Paul Herx, SPD (Professional Standards and Internal Affairs)
 - Ms. Jennifer Blake, SPD (crime analyst)
 - Investigator Jonathan Hall, SPD (the Union)
 - Sgt. Greg Smith, SPD (the Union)
- B. On February 26, 2013, presentations were made by Mr. Thomas Battles (Regional Director of the Department of Justice Community Relations Services,) the Honorable Phil Archer (State Attorney for the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit,) and the Honorable Blaise Trettis (Public Defender for the Eighteenth Judicial Circuit.)

Mr. Battles explained the goals of the Community Relations Service. The Community Relations Service of the Department of Justice is focused on peacemaking. The CRS does not lay blame; instead, it exists as a prescription for the problem. Mr. Battles has concluded that the Sanford Pastors Connecting Group will be vital in playing a key role in keeping peace in the community regardless of the Zimmerman verdict. He also discussed the Fair and Impartial Policing presentation scheduled for May 2013, sponsored by the Department of Justice.

Mr. Archer stated that from the perspective of his attorneys in the courtroom the biggest hurdle regarding SPD is the lack of community support. Mr. Archer stated Sanford needs a strong commitment to community policing. There needs to be a healthy relationship between law enforcement and the community. If the community is in partnership with law enforcement, witnesses will be more likely to cooperate and appear for trial. He also stated that training on all levels is a key component so that the Sanford Police Department can assist in continuing investigations even after the point of arrest.

Mr. Trettis explained that the perceptions from the Public Defender's Office regarding the City of Sanford's law enforcement are not positive. He explained that it has been expressed that the level of professionalism is not the same, nor as diligent, as other police agencies, notably the Sheriff's Department. Specifically, some of the officers are less than candid when preparing reports or testifying at deposition or in court.

- C. On April 23, 2013, Dr. Lorie Fridell spoke to the Blue Ribbon Panel. Dr. Fridell is a nationally recognized expert on Fair and Impartial Policing (historically called racial bias.) She explained the training scheduled at SPD for May 16 and 17, 2013. The training involves 9 members of the Sanford Police Department's Command Squad, and 5 members of the Blue Ribbon Panel. Together the leaders of the Sanford Police Department (including the new Chief) and the stakeholders from the Sanford community would discuss police practices and policy, with an eye towards eliminating not only overt bias but also subtle bias. Science proves that people will use what has been called the "blink response" to fill in gaps when dealing with vague or unknown variables about people. This can happen in every human dynamic, but when it happens in law enforcement officers' safety is put at risk, and relationships between law enforcement and the community are strained. Training covers Bias Free Recruiting, Education, Leadership, Supervision, Accountability and how to implement a comprehensive program to overcome this bias.

Commendations:

- The Panel has concluded that there are many positive aspects of the SPD.
- The agency is well organized.
- SPD is thorough in the vetting of new hires.
- SPD has a long history of outreach, although the outreach is inconsistent.
- SPD is making substantial progress with Community Policing.
- The new task force ("Neighborhood Response Unit") in Goldsboro is making a significant number of arrests for violent crimes.
- SPD has maximized the use of limited resources.
- Officers are consistently visible in the business district. With the new Walk and Talk concept there is increased visibility in the community.
- SPD is successfully using technology to investigate crime, particularly with the "shots fired" incidents during the first half of 2013.
- SPD is responding to complaints raised about crime, resulting, for example, in the new task force in Goldsboro and attendance at the Westside Community meetings.
- SPD working in collaboration with the Department of Justice scheduled quality training on Fair and Impartial Policing scheduled May. The Command Squad of SPD attended the training along with stakeholders in the community, i.e. civilians.
- SPD is focusing on the Sanford youth, via the schools.
- The exit report authored by Interim Chief Myers contains valuable recommendations and should be used as a resource in the future.
- Chief Smith is recognized for his efforts to improve community relations in the very short time he has been in Sanford. He has engaged in numerous activities that put him in touch with the community, for example the "Walk and Talk" program.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Funding:

Conclusion

1. The Panel has concluded that SPD is underfunded and understaffed, particularly when compared with other agencies of similar size. For instance, SPD had to divert resources from other critical areas when establishing the new task force in Goldsboro in spring of this year. The division of resources has resulted in an unacceptable number of calls per officer, which affects response time, which could affect arrest rates. It could also affect officer morale, thereby lowering professional standards as officers interact with the victims, with witnesses, with suspects, and with the public in general.

Recommendation

The City should allocate sufficient funding so that SPD can fill the positions that are currently vacant. The City should consider additional funding for special task forces and other innovative activities.

Conclusion

2. The compensation of SPD officers should be thoroughly reviewed by the City. There are nine police agencies in Seminole County and SPD entrance level compensation ranks eighth. The low pay could be affecting officer morale, which affects job performance. Additionally, SPD officers face challenges that officers of higher paying agencies do not face.

Recommendation

The City should bring salaries up to at least the average rate paid to other law enforcement agencies in Seminole County.

Police practices:

Conclusion

1. SPD does not have enough focus on the crime on the street, as the crime is happening. This Panel heard anecdotal evidence that officers will drive by as crime, such as gambling or drug offenses, occurs in plain view.

Recommendation

When SPD officers observe crime, even minimal crime, they should stop and investigate. This would result not only in the intervention regarding that individual criminal activity but also would prevent the escalation of criminal acts in that area. The Panel recognizes that current resources may not be sufficient to presently implement this recommendation.

Conclusion

2. Community Policing is defined as engaged policing that builds relationships and builds and engages the community, and is implemented throughout the City. Community Policing is implemented inconsistently in the African American communities, particularly

Goldsboro. This Panel heard testimony that the people of Goldsboro do not have positive relationships with the police officers assigned to their area.

Recommendation

Community policing should be used throughout the City, but particularly with a focus on the areas of the City that have higher crime. Furthermore other citizens in Sanford, beyond Goldsboro, indicated to this Panel that they lack community policing as well. Goldsboro is an area of specific concern. But community policing is vital throughout the City. One suggestion to increase police presence in Goldsboro is to establish police substations in the area. Admittedly, the Public Safety Complex is blocks away from the heart of Goldsboro. However, strategically placed substations would emphasize police presence and could be used for other purposes as well, such as functioning as pretrial release centers. If the street level officers were closer to the neighborhoods, their presence would not only deter crime, but would also facilitate development of relationships with the people who live there. As State Attorney Phil Archer stated to the Panel, "If the community is in partnership with law enforcement, then the witnesses will be more apt to cooperate and appear for trial." The Sanford Police Department should be brought up to capacity, and all budgeted positions should be filled, in order to fully implement community policing. When the agency is understaffed the demands on their time is such that the officers do not have time to concentrate on building relationships in the community.

Conclusion

3. SPD is not as thorough as constitutionally permissible in efforts to combat crime. DUI Check points are under-utilized. When checkpoints are used for DUI interception the officers should also check for valid licenses and proof of registration.

Recommendation

The Panel recommends that the checkpoints be used consistently so that assertions of selective enforcement cannot be made. SPD and its legal advisors should research and develop methods for further investigation of crime, for example check points.

Conclusion

4. SPD generates incomplete police reports that do not reflect positive and negative facts. The incomplete reports make the prosecutors' job in court more difficult, and failing to include exculpatory information could result in violations of the Constitution.

Recommendation

The Panel recognizes that preparation of arrest reports, especially under the stress of arrest and booking, is both time consuming and tedious. However, accurate arrest reports enable the prosecutors to properly determine the appropriate charges to bring and enhance the testimony of the arresting officer if called to testify at trial. Citizens who serve on juries expect police witnesses to have made a thorough investigation when the burden of proof is beyond a reasonable doubt. Thus, the thorough investigation and reporting of crime is necessary to obtain convictions. Officers should remember that their reports are utilized through every stage of a criminal case, from the determination of conditions of pretrial release at first appearance to sentencing. Additionally, the arrest report is often the best tool used to prepare for a trial that takes place months after the report was written.

Conclusion

5. SPD officers have a reputation of concluding that their job is complete at the point of arrest. According to the State Attorney, Assistant State Attorneys have “tasked” SPD officers for additional information, post-arrest, and SPD officers have responded “You have investigators, use one of your investigators to gather the additional information.” The officers are not working in cooperation with the prosecutors when they respond in this fashion.

Recommendation

SPD officers need additional training in their role and how they are to function with the State Attorney’s Office. An arrest accomplishes little if there is no conviction. SPD officers should investigate and assist prosecutors beyond the point of arrest, so that the prosecutor can meet his or her burden in court.

Conclusion

6. The Panel has received reports that SPD has enforced the law inconsistently, and that this may be manifesting in a racially-biased dynamic.

Recommendation

SPD officers should be educated about “Fair and Impartial Policing” so that the law is enforced in a consistent manner, thus avoiding the appearance of racial bias. The Panel recommends that the City or the Federal Department of Justice fund the “Training of the Trainers” so that the appropriate members of SPD are trained to educate SPD officers on this important aspect of policing. The Panel believes this training will enhance trust in the agency. Upon completion of the Training of the Trainers SPD should establish a rollout plan to train the remaining members of SPD. A quarterly progress report should be provided to the Citizens’ Advisory Board to ensure timely compliance with the recommendation.

Conclusion

7. The new Task Force in Goldsboro has been a success but the Panel is concerned about the long term use of the Task Force.

Recommendation

The Panel encourages SPD to invest in the Goldsboro Task Force on a long-term basis, and use data collected to show long-term results.

Conclusion

8. The citizens of Sanford complain of problems regarding response time to calls for service.

Recommendation

Supervisors should make sure that the lack of a speedy response is not caused by unmotivated officers. Dispatchers should comply with standard operating procedures established by the Seminole County Sheriff’s Department and be trained on an acceptable protocol to explain to the callers that there is a prioritization of calls, and the possibility that they may have to wait for a response to a non-emergency call. An adequately staffed department should reduce these types of complaints. (See Recommendation #2 under Police Practices regarding adequate staffing.)

Training:

Conclusion

1. SPD is vetting the officers well at the point of hiring but continued training and periodic evaluation of new officer performance is sporadic.

Recommendation

SPD should continue the vetting of new hires but should require additional training of new officers either by extending the probationary period for the new officers or establishing a regular training schedule. The Panel is concerned about the implementation of the training on the street. Additional supervised basic training should improve performance. Training should include impressing new officers with the attitude of protection and peace towards citizens and conveying a sense of community service rather than an "us versus them" mentality.

Conclusion

2. Body cameras can be an accountability system and training dynamic. SPD has body cameras they cannot use because the City does not have enough bandwidth to support the cameras.

Recommendation

The City should acquire the band width and cameras necessary to place body cameras on more of the officers.

Management:

Conclusion

1. Just as there are excellent performers as well as underperforming employees in every industry, SPD has some underperforming officers.

Recommendation

The Chief of Police should assess which officers are not performing and create a dynamic to encourage those officers to seek other employment. The Chief will need the support of City government to back up the decision to replace officers who do not measure up to standards.

Conclusion

2. SPD keeps detailed statistics as required by the FBI but, according to the information supplied to the Panel, the statistics do not provide meaningful information for SPD management to use to assess criminal activity in Sanford. Lack of data on drug crimes is an example.

Recommendation

SPD and its crime statistics should serve multiple purposes. Not only should SPD keep statistics (as required) in order to report to the FBI, but it should also keep statistics so that SPD management can track and measure crime, including data on drugs. The SPD management could then ascertain which crime or crimes deserve additional resources.

Conclusion

3. Grievances against SPD's officers can help management ascertain who is performing appropriately or not on the street. If the public understands how grievances are filed the public's trust in SPD will increase, due to the opportunity to be heard.

Recommendation

SPD must take as many steps possible to alert the public of the grievance process. Citizens who file grievances or complaints should be kept informed of the progress and outcomes of their grievances or complaints.

Conclusion

4. SPD's morale could be improved.

Recommendation

SPD should put a system in place which publicly recognizes and awards officers for their excellent work and achievements. This could be accomplished through an annual award ceremony, and through choice assignments, promotions and commendations.

Conclusion

5. A competent Internal Affairs Department protects the department and the citizens.

Recommendation

SPD should continue training and adherence to standards and best practices in order to maintain professionalism.

Reporting of Crime:

Conclusion

1. Law enforcement cannot be in all places at all times. Officers often must rely upon information reported by private citizens. However, some citizens believe that officers do not take their reports of crime seriously. Local residents have concerns about SPD protecting their confidentiality when reporting crime. This is particularly important in Sanford where many people know each other and the reporting of crime can create stresses in relationships or in fact might result in danger to the reporting citizen. If SPD officers release information as to who provided information of criminal activity or the identity of the person called 911, citizens are unnecessarily put at risk of reprisal and the concepts of community policing are undermined.

Recommendation

SPD should, when possible, protect reporting citizens' confidentiality. The Panel recognizes that the identity of reporting citizens may ultimately have to be disclosed if they become witnesses in a criminal case. However, that disclosure should normally be left to the prosecuting authority and not the investigating officer. Officers should take pains not to reveal their sources unless obligated under the law or the necessity of the case. The telephone number for Crimeline should be publicized because it provides an anonymous source of information.

Conclusion

2. Cameras in neighborhoods could deter crime.

Recommendation

SPD should investigate the possibility of installation of cameras in neighborhoods with high criminal activity. SPD should recommend the installation of cameras to the City government if it appears that cameras could be an effective crime detection tool. There is reported success with the use of cameras in Orlando.

Conclusion

3. Neighborhood Watch groups can assist the deterrence of crime.

Recommendation

Neighborhood Watch should be expanded. Involving local residents in Neighborhood Watch in the various neighborhoods would create scenarios where citizens are in dialogue with law enforcement. Additionally information could be passed anonymously to law enforcement, through the Neighborhood Watch officers. The reporting of criminal activity as it is happening could result in a greater number of arrests and fewer unresolved cases. Neighborhood Watch programs tend to become inactive without the support and participation of police as part of community policing.

Relationship to the Community:

Conclusion

1. The citizens of Sanford may need explanation of the laws periodically. (See, for example, the immunity concepts of the "Stand Your Ground Law.")

Recommendation

Educated citizens who understand the division of responsibility among the various elements of the criminal justice system are less likely to respond negatively to police action in tense situations. The Panel has been informed that the City of Sanford has hired a public information officer to assist in the future and that is a positive step in the right direction.

SPD, in conjunction with the State Attorney's Office, should be in dialogue with the community about the criminal laws, and the criminal process. Instead of merely enforcing the law, both SPD and the prosecutors could work to explain the law through community meetings, open house sessions at the police station, tabling events, and public forums. SPD and the prosecutors must be in the community, in order to share that information. It is likely that much of the tension surrounding the Trayvon Martin shooting could have been lessened if the public had been better informed concerning the possible unintended consequences of an arrest and the substantive law of "Stand Your Ground." Communication will result in trust. And communication happens through proximity. The Panel urges SPD and the City of Sanford to find formal opportunities for dialogue and education, and for the street level officers to seek opportunities to educate. The Panel has been informed that the SPD is in the process of hiring a Public Information Officer and that is a step in the right direction.

Conclusion

2. SPD lacks a victim advocacy program and one should be established.

Recommendation

The only contact person with SPD the victims currently have are the investigating officers who should not be responsible for this function. Victims are not getting follow-up information from SPD and this contributes to a lack of support or lack of trust. Victims are in need of both information and respect, and trained victim advocates can provide the assistance victims need.

The Victims Advocate could be trained volunteers. The training of the volunteers and management of the program will be an additional cost, which the City may need to underwrite, but the cost will be somewhat offset because officers will be relieved of this responsibility.

The Victims Advocate position could be so valuable to the Department that eventually this could be a paid position instead of volunteer position.

Conclusion

3. SPD must develop a closer partnership with the citizens of Sanford. Relationships would serve both the community and SPD. Law enforcement is profiled by the community as well; relationships would help the community understand who the officers are as well.

Recommendation

Partnership requires communication. Communication between SPD and the public can be enhanced via community newsletters, and community awards from SPD to blocks that are free of crime for a particular period of time. SPD or the City should create incentives for SPD officers to move into neighborhoods to promote visibility and community. Perhaps these incentives can come from community development dollars. SPD could create opportunities to mingle with citizens of Sanford via "Meet and Mingle" events, held in different parts of Sanford each month. The events would last one or two hours and could be held at parks, houses of worship, businesses or even a parking lot of a business. The officers in SPD should be encouraged to participate in more community outreach programs, beyond the current scenario of merely Neighborhood Watch and the boxing club, which is affiliated with the Seminole County Police Athletic League (PAL.) SPD should consider creating a position titled "Community Relation Coordinator" who oversees a 3-year plan for developing a closer relationship with the community. This Coordinator would work with the Citizens' Advisory Board made up of representatives of the community/community leaders who would help develop an action plan for relationship building. The Citizens' Advisory Board should be reviewed to ensure that the community is well represented regarding race, age, gender, ethnicity, and geography. The reports from the Citizens' Advisory Board should be available on the City's webpage as well as the SPD web page.

Conclusion

4. SPD should develop a closer relationship with the citizens of Goldsboro.

Recommendation

The City should invest in the Goldsboro area so crime will dissipate. This investment should be in bricks and mortar and building a city, but it should also include the soft skills of people power, and human capital. Crime prevention can come in many forms; one method of crime prevention is investing in the youth by giving the youth an alternative to criminal activity. Funding programs that keep the youth busy and stimulated will alleviate the issues that provide youth with the incentive to commit crime. This investment in the community will build trust which will result in relationships. If the relationships are enhanced citizens who know about crime will give information to the police, and citizens who are witnesses to crime will be more likely to come to court to testify.

Conclusion

5. Law enforcement should be proactive in trying to prevent crime. The City of Sanford should take steps towards giving Sanford's youth opportunities that keep them on the right path. These opportunities can cost money, and the entire community (not just government) can support crime prevention activities for youth.

Recommendation

SPD and the City of Sanford should actively work with corporations and businesses to seek sponsorship of and support for the SPD efforts in youth programs, such as Save the Youth Initiative and Young Men of Excellence, in order to decrease the amount of crimes involving youth in the community.

Conclusion

6. SPD currently engages in informal mediation between complaining citizens and police officers. Supervisors may intercede and use a form of mediation on the street if there is an assertion that an officer was rude or inappropriate.

Recommendation

Citizens' complaints or allegations of rude or inappropriate conduct on the part of law enforcement should be documented in order to identify repeat offenders.

Conclusion

7. Sanford Police Department does not currently have an active Citizens' Advisory Board.

Recommendation

The City through the City Commissioners should empanel a new Citizens' Advisory Board, which would serve not as a group that micromanages SPD but instead would provide the Chief a sounding board. The Citizens' Advisory Board would consist of both law enforcement members and lay people. The Advisory Board would provide (a) accountability (b) credibility and (c) visibility.

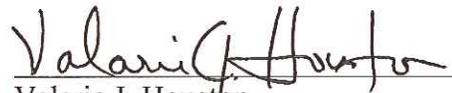
Future Expectations:

The Citizens' Advisory Board should have as one of its duties the review of these recommendations. The Citizens' Advisory Board should ascertain which of these recommendations were and were not implemented by the City and/or by SPD.

Respectfully submitted June 4, 2013.



The Hon. O.H. Eaton Jr.
18th Judicial Circuit Judge



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Additional Blue Ribbon Panel Members

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