

# BADGES FOR BASEBALL PODCAST SERIES

## TOPIC: LAW ENFORCEMENT RECRUITMENT AND SUPPORT

**Q: What is your name?**

A: Eric Bolden

**Q: What agency do you work for and where is it located? What is your position?**

A: I work for the Sarasota Police Department in Sarasota, Florida. I am a Sergeant in the Community Relations Unit.

**Q: How long have you been in law enforcement?**

A: I have been in law enforcement for 30 years.

**Q: What influenced you to go into the law enforcement profession?**

A: I was always interested in law enforcement as a kid growing up. When I got to high school two of my coaches and the team photographer were Sarasota Police Officers. I started talking to them and they put me on the right path. They became role models and mentors to me on my journey.

**Q: How and why did the Sarasota Police Department get involved with a youth-serving organization like the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota?**

A: The Sarasota Police Department has a long history of being involved in the community. Many of our officers over the years have served as coaches, Boys and Girls Scout Leaders, mentors with Big Brothers and Big Sisters, etc.

**Q: Was their immediate support from the rest of your department?**

A: With anything new, it can take awhile to get buy-in from others and get full support. Our program is strictly voluntary so we know we are only getting the officers who want to be involved.

**Q: What tips do you have for other law enforcement officers looking to get engaged with a youth-serving organization? What are the steps they can take?**

A: First and foremost you must have a love for helping youth and be fully ready to be committed to the program. Many of the youth in organizations come from single parent households with some being very



unstable with broken promises and disappointments. We have to be in a position to not just provide a “band aid,” but long term care with continued follow up. Once that is in place, find an organization that is willing to partner with your department.

**Q: How long have you been volunteering in the *Badges for Baseball* program?**

A: Since 2014

**Q: Is your volunteer time built into your shift? Or do you just stop by a club as your patrolling? Do you volunteer on your own time?**

A: Actually all three, time is built in to our shift, but we also find time to stop by the club if we are patrolling the area and many of our officers will volunteer on their off days.

**Q: If you volunteer in the program during your on-duty hours, is it difficult to get that approved by your supervisors? What steps did you have to go through?**

A: We have a core group of officers that participate in the program. We only find officers who are interested and love working with youth. We have buy in from our Command Staff for officers to work on and off duty with community programs. Additionally, we budget for officers to receive overtime compensation for working with youth programs if events fall on their day(s) off.

**Q: How long are you typically at the club? What types of activities do you participate in when volunteering?**

A: We are typically at the club for one hour a week, sometimes twice a week. Our discussions focus on life topics and current events. We play basketball, Quickball, bocce ball, table and board games and many other activities with the kids.

**Q: How did you recruit additional officers to volunteer with the *Badges for Baseball* program?**

A: We send out an email explaining the program to see who would be interested. We try to target officers that we know have a passion for volunteering and impacting youth.

**Q: How do you keep the same officers coming back to programs and get them involved in new programs? Are there incentives to volunteer?**

A: We try to stick with the same officers, but that is hard to do with attrition and officers being promoted or reassigned to other units and they suddenly have less time to commit. The overtime compensation is an incentive, additionally being involved with community programs counts towards promotional testing points.



**Q:** Prior to volunteering with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota, what was your view about the relationship between youth and law enforcement in your community?

**A:** I believe that many youth had jaded views of law enforcement based on what they have seen, heard or perceived. Programs between youth and law enforcement builds trust and positive interactions leading to successful and meaningful relationships.

**Q:** As a result of that perceived relationship, why was it important for you to get engaged with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota?

**A:** We wanted to stop the cycle of negativity and hate towards law enforcement in the community, and we figured the best palce to start was by working with youth.

**Q:** Have any other initiatives evolved from your involvement in the *Badges for Baseball* program?

**A:** Yes, we have initiatives in other areas of the community, where we use some of the principles and lessons from *Badges for Baseball*.

**Q:** What positive changes have you seen in your community as a result of your involvement in youth programs?

**A:** Personally I love the relationships I have with the kids, it warms my heart when one of the kids see me in or out of uniform in the community and they run up to me to give me a fist bump or just say hello. Additionally, when you have parents coming up to you telling you what their child has told them what they learned from you, it speaks volumes that you cannot put a price on. When you have buy in from the parents and the child, you have most definitely made an impact.

