

Americus reports lowest violent crime rate in three decades



by Greg Loyd

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Americus crime at 30-year-low

AMERICUS, Ga—The latest crime statistics reveal violence in Americus dropped to a 30-year low, according to Police Chief Mark Scott.

Scott said Americus crime statistics go back about three decades. He said law enforcement measures crime in two categories: Part I and Part II. Violent crimes such as murder, rape, aggravated assault, and arson all fall in the Part I category, while all other offenses are measured within the Part II classification.

"Numbers go up and down. We can have good years and bad years. But when you look at it over a long period of time, it kind of gives you an idea of how you're actually trending," Scott said. "So when you look at it over a 30 year period, back in the 90's is when we had, probably, the biggest peak here in Americus. Since that time, it's steadily gone down, year-after-year-after-year."

While the chief takes pride in the positive news, Scott said it's a team effort that extends beyond the police department.

"We can't take full credit for the numbers going down. When they go up, we can't take full blame for that, either. It's a partnership between us and the community," Scott said.

He added over the past five years, the Americus Police Department and community members developed stronger bonds, motivating more people to report crime. He believes that plays a huge role in keeping violent crime rates trending down.

But Scott pointed out negative events often receive the most traction in the court of public opinion, thanks in large part to social media. Therefore, he said he believes it's important to point out good news-- such as the steady decline in crime in Americus.

"Crime trends over time aren't flashy. It's not something you can show a big picture of or get a lot of comments on, but I think it's important that people know that we do have a safe community here and we do compare well with all the other communities in our area," Scott said.

Scott acknowledged that COVID-19 has impacted law enforcement, his department, and those across the country. He said his officers tried to stay engaged as much as possible, even though many of their regularly scheduled outreach programs had to be canceled.

The chief also said COVID-19 hindered Part II crime statistics reporting, which covers nonviolent offenses. Scott said those numbers fell during 2020 in Americus but added it is very hard to gauge those trends due to the need to enforce social separation amid the pandemic. That meant, for example, officers conducted less traffic enforcement campaigns.

"So, we had a lot fewer DUI cases, not because there were less DUI's, but because our officers, were, because of COVID, they were told to make fewer traffic stops. . . the Part II numbers can vary based on our activity," said Scott. "The Part I numbers, though, which are the serious crimes which are reported by the citizens, those tend to be fairly constant."

Scott added that it's impossible to know the exact extent to which the pandemic has impacted crime statistics locally, statewide, and nationally.

"We can't really know what impact COVID had on overall crime. Crime across the United States varied from region-to-region. We had some areas, especially the larger cities in 2020, that saw a huge increase in violent crime. A lot of our smaller cities showed a decrease," said Scott. "So, we're not the only city in Georgia that showed a significant decrease last year, but we're proud to be one of those smaller Georgia cities that did have a good decrease."