

D.A.'s Staff Offers a Closer Look at Our Justice System

By Craig McGuire

When not convicting dangerous criminals you might find the staff of Kings County District Attorney Charles Hynes teaching a free seminar on law at your local precinct or advising students at area schools.

At the 78th precinct's monthly community council meeting, representatives from the D.A.'s office outlined an array of programs available to the people of Brooklyn.

"We measure our success by the fact that we're non-traditional, with programs that make a difference," said Deputy District Attorney Barry Schreiber.

Responsible for a jurisdiction of 70 square miles, with a populace exceeding 2.3 million, D.A. Hynes divided the borough into five district areas developing a strategy called community prosecution.

Schreiber explained, "what it enables us to do is devote our resources so we

can concentrate on particular crime patterns and problems in individual communities."

Schreiber said community prosecution gives the people a voice in public safety. "Traditional prosecutors don't do that. Everybody gets around the table and decides what you need most."

According to Schreiber, prosecuting criminals, while the D.A.'s primary duties, is not the only community service performed

by his office.

In the "Adopt A School" program, members of the D.A.'s office spend ten hours per month each year with a fifth grade class.

According to Schreiber, fifth graders are chosen because studies have shown children begin making important decisions at that age.

"What we talk to them about is the evils of bias, of hating someone because of their color, nationality, or their sexual orientation," said Schreiber.

Another interesting program sponsored by the D.A. is a community law school. Representatives from the D.A.'s office speak to various groups during the evening over a period of four to five weeks. "We have people who are experts and would be glad to come and speak to you," said Schreiber.

Topics include criminal law, eviction law, landlord-tenant law, consumer law, domestic relations law, "so we can remove some of the skepticism I know you have about the criminal justice system," said Schreiber.

"We also celebrate Brooklyn's cultural diversity by honoring those people who have distinguished themselves in various areas and of various heritages," added Schreiber.

Upcoming events in which the District Attorney's office participates include Jewish history month in January, African American month in February,

has testified at hearings in Albany for a bill that would increase the penalties for bias related crimes. The bill has stalled in the Republican dominated Senate.

"The only way we are going to unify and diversify is by letting everybody know we are not going to tolerate crimes based on hate," noted Schreiber.

To punctuate those goals, Schreiber added, "we practice what we preach."

According to Schreiber, 40 percent of the bureau chiefs in the D.A.'s office are either African-American or Latino and more than 65 percent of them are women.

Extending the idea of

community involvement, the D.A. created ten advisory councils that meet regularly with the D.A. to discuss issues concerning public safety and ethnic groups.

These advisory councils include African American/Caribbean American, Irish American, Italian American, Gay and Lesbian, Jewish American, Latino American, Senior Citizen, Women's, Occupational Health and Safety, and the recently created Youth Advisory council.

For more information concerning these programs contact the District Attorney's office at (718) 802-2995.