

The Honor and Recognition of the Naming of the North Nashville Precinct Station

"The efforts of the Metropolitan Police Department's Community Relations Section could well serve as a model for other cities, and I urge my fellow Members of the Congress to read in full the report of this exceptional program as written by Frances Meeker, a reporter for the Nashville Banner. —The "Good Guys" Cool a Sweltering Summer With Fun—Police Provide Entertainment For Heavily Populated Areas."

***Richard Fulton
Congressman
August 4, 1969
Congressional Record-House
Washington D. C.***

The above words were extracted from an entire page of the United States Congressional Record, written in an effort to recognize the abilities and the dedicated loyal service of officer William Bodenhamer.

Recognition such as the above is only one of many efforts made by black policemen at a time when the relationship between community and the police department was not very positive. With only a band full of black officers during the 50's and 60's, their efforts as miniscule as it appears today, were of volcanic magnitude then. Those were the times of separate roll calls, separate police cars (if you were assigned one), and if you got on the force as with William Bodenhamer, you had to wait until another black officer died or retired. Blacks could not arrest whites and could only patrol black sectors of the city. Sometimes a laughing matter now to those who endured, it surely was a serious issue then.

The new North Precinct Station should be named after Captain William David Bodenhamer with a dedication to Officer Thomas Earl Johnson as two of Nashville's original finest black patrolmen. Most of all of their initial work was committed to the people of North and South Nashville where they only permitted to patrol.

Officer Johnson a ten year veteran, was gunned down in January 1968, in the line of duty after he stopped a car bearing Ohio license plates to question the occupants about the passing of stolen money orders. Another officer was shot in that incident. Johnson was the first black officer killed in the line of duty in Nashville.

Officer Bodenhamer, who became a member of the department in 1954, was an officer of many firsts in his contributions to the Police Department, the local communities and the City of Nashville. He received many awards and decorations for his tireless efforts.

From 1954^u to 1962 Captain Bodenhamer served in the Patrol Division, as a foot patrolman in North Nashville and later assigned to a patrol car. During this time Captain Bodenhamer made numerous significant arrests and validated his credentials as a good police officer. Not only did he deal with the criminal element in the community, this is when he began to establish his dynamic and loyal relationship with the community. Captain Bodenhamer received numerous accolades by going to local and neighborhood schools and churches promoting a positive role of the policeman.

On May 1, 1962 Mayor Ben West appointed Captain Bodenhamer as the first and only black officer to the Traffic Division. He became the first black motorcycle policeman at that time bringing honor to his family and community. In 1963, Captain Bodenhamer received the first of two Odd Fellows Awards, "For unusual and outstanding devotion to duty and law enforcement". This award was presented to the officer that who makes the best criminal case originating from a traffic arrest. Captain Bodenhamer was the first black officer ever to do so.

In May 1964, Mayor Beverly Briley and Police Chief Joe Kemp approved the formation of the first Youth Aid Bureau. Captain Bodenhamer was assigned by Chief Kemp as one of the original five men assigned to this unit, under Sergeant Charles Stoner, Juvenile Bureau Head. They were then sent to the University of Oklahoma's Delinquency Control Institute to study. Through this bureau Captain Bodenhamer helped to curb juvenile delinquency and youth gangs in the Nashville area seeking out youth to assist in solving problems.

In 1966, Captain Bodenhamer was promoted to Sergeant and assigned to the West Nashville Patrol Unit. There he began to attend Aquinas Junior College when off duty in its Police Science Program. Captain Bodenhamer remained at the West Station for two years.

A new unit was formed in the Police Department in May, 1968, entitled the Community Relations Section. This was initially a four-man unit and was headed by Captain Bodenhamer while he was still a sergeant. He and Officer Isaac Burford were the first two black officers in this division. Mayor Beverly Briley called this program "one of the most forward-looking steps ever taken by the Metro Police Department". This section's primary function was to foster better relations between the police Department and the Nashville community. Its programs included providing free movies during summer months to reduced income, underprivileged areas, community football and baseball teams, provide transportation and personnel to conduct tours of the Police Department for schools. It was also to provide lectures to classes and civic groups, take children to circuses, hockey games, the Opryland Amusement Park and summer camps.

In order to better his sections ability to relate to the community, Captain Bodenhamer attended the FBI National Academy, Quantico, VA, and the Mutual Responsibility in Community Relation Program, Memphis State University, Memphis, TN.

Congressman Richard Fulton summed up many of the accolades given to Captain Bodenhamer and his dedication to the community in review in the U. S. Congressional Record, on August 4, 1969. It specifically refers to then Sergeant Bodenhamer and the successful brainchild he created in the departments summer programs. An excerpt from this document can be reviewed as an attachment to this document. In 1970, Captain Bodenhamer received the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Club, Inc. Special Merit Award for his community activities.

In 1971, Captain Bodenhamer received the Odd Fellows Award for the second time. Even though he was in Community Relations, his general duty as a police officer still prevailed.

In 1973, Captain Bodenhamer was promoted to Lieutenant and Head of the now Community Relations Division increasing its status from just a section. Continuing his efforts in the community, Captain Bodenhamer, energized the "Officer Bill Program" with the help of the Nashville Chamber of Commerce. This program allowed policemen to visit classrooms and distribute Officer Bill books that explained the job and duties of the policeman and an initial explanation of life's rules to young kids. A hit with kids in the classroom, Captain Bodenhamer stressed their relations with dialogue in the university community, introducing students to police work by allowing them to ride with them on the job. He also reintroduces the walking patrol in the Edgehill and Sudekum homes area. Captain Bodenhamer received the Community Service and Attainment Award, presented by the Middle Tennessee Business Association.

As a youth coach for 12 years for the Police Department for both baseball and football, Captain Bodenhamer helped to instill discipline, responsibility and team work in underprivileged youth. His teams won several division championships. Captain Bodenhamer was recognized for his efforts by the youth association when selected as Junior Pro Football Coach of the Year in 1974.

In October 1975, Captain Bodenhamer received the first Community Relations Award, Community Relations Officer of the Year, presented by the Nashville Tennessean, to the best officer with the best record in community relations. It was stated by then Asst. Chief Charles Flanders "--Bodenhamer, is a man who puts in a lot of hours on community relations". In 1976, he was promoted to Captain.

Recognized as a lot more than routine police work in 1981, Captain Bodenhamer was again honored with the Commissioners Award, by the Metro Development and Housing Agency (MDHA) for his outstanding continuing efforts to provide a secure wholesome environment for the residents of housing operated by MDHA. The Frontiers International Nashville Club also recognized him for his dedicated work with Big Brothers of Nashville.

By the time the Police Department opened up their Community Relations Music Row Precinct Station in 1982, Captain Bodenhamer's division had grown to 53 and added to its original mission were patrolmen walking beats.

Captain Bodenhamer left the Community Relations Division in late 1982, and became the Commander of the Vehicle Impoundment Division. He remained there until his retirement in 1990 and became a Federal U.S. Marshall, Court Security Officer. In April 1992, he was recognized as one of the Eclipse Chapter #220, Order of the Eastern Star 100 "Role Models".

After thirty-four years of dedicated service to the Nashville Community and Police Department, Captain Bodenhamer should be so honored with this recognition. A man whose life was centered around the activities of all of Nashville, what better way to honor him with the naming of the North Nashville Precinct Station building for him. Most of the time many Policemen do not get the kind of praise they deserve for a job well done and the long hours they dedicate of themselves; missing memorable moments with family and friends while serving their community. Now is the time to give some of that lost time back to those policemen so that their families now and in the future can say it was worth it.

He set standards for many to follow and broke ground for many to succeed.

Captain Bodenhamer was born in Giles County, Tennessee the son of Sam Bodenhamer and Pearline Bodenhamer-Green. His formal education began in Nashville and he graduated from Pearl High School, where he was the captain of the football team his senior year which had accumulated a 47-4 record during his attendance. Married, Captain Bodenhamer has three adult children, three grandchildren and one great grand child. He is a Trustee and Deacon at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, 32nd Avenue North.