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Wayne State U. Puts Its Hopes, and Its Money, Into Detroit

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DETROIT
WAYNE STATE University's police chief, Anthony Holt, might strike some as an unlikely shepherd of the Detroit economy. The 35-year veteran of the campus police force wears big glasses and a thick mustache. He won't say how much he bench presses, but he wins bets on it.

In a conference room at Wayne State police headquarters, Mr. Holt leads officers, local business owners, and academics through a bi-weekly breakdown of recent crime in the Midtown neighborhood, which surrounds the campus. Assaults, burglaries, and auto thefts are all way down this year in Midtown, despite Detroit's having the highest rate of violent crime of any big city in the country.

The conference-room windows overlook an old Cadillac dealership being knocked down for a \$93-million biomedical-research building for the university, a potential economic driver in the troubled city. But in addition to Wayne State's development deals and stabilizing presence, its aggressive effort to push away crime has had its own powerful effect on Midtown, helping bring back business owners and real-estate investors to the area. Major crimes here have declined 50 percent in the past five years.

Wayne State officials and Midtown leaders exude confidence despite the city's filing for Chapter 9 bankruptcy in July. Many say Detroit's hope for an economic revival will begin in a safer Midtown, one of the few areas where people are moving in and jobs are being created.

The Wayne State police "more or less flipped the script, so to speak, in transforming this agency from a campus police department into a big city, state-of-the-art police department," says David Martin, a research associate at Wayne State's Center for Urban Studies.

Over those five years, the university has doubled the number of its officers, to 60, putting most of the focus on policing the broader Midtown area, not just its urban campus, which has less crime than that of the University of Michigan, in leafy Ann Arbor.



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Cary Glazer is one of the Wayne State police officers who patrol the university's Midtown Detroit neighborhood, as well as the campus. Their presence has helped make the area safer than much of the rest of the city.

Some of those officers, who are commissioned with full police authority within Detroit, are paid with funds from philanthropic foundations, but the university itself has spent about \$3-million a year policing the area outside the main campus.

"My goal is to be at 100 officers," says Mr. Holt. "During the day, during the night, it doesn't matter. We will respond."

'NICE THINGS ABOUT DETROIT'

In Midtown, the results of Mr. Holt's attitude are starting to show. New apartments, dormitories, and retail stores that sell high-end watches and "Say Nice Things About Detroit" T-shirts are springing up in place of parking lots and abandoned buildings.

Crime is "arguably the most important issue in this city. Investment decisions, be that as individuals or families, are all tied up with this perception of public safety," says Robin Boyle, chair of Wayne State's department of

urban studies and planning. "That has to be dealt with."

Wayne State is also pouring employees into Midtown as residents. The university chips in \$200,000 a year for an incentive program that has helped fill 96 percent of residences in the neighborhood, mostly with employees of Wayne State and Henry Ford Hospital, which is affiliated with the university. The money goes to home loans, lease renewals, and renovation projects.

And around the 4.8 square miles that Mr. Holt's force polices—in a city of about 139 square miles—many residents have gained their first faith in public safety. "He's created a reputation and an aura where he gets things fixed—even if it's outside the Wayne State borders," says Dennis M. Richardson, a deputy chief in the Wayne County Sheriff's Office.

Success, of course, is relative. For every booming business, there's an empty storefront. The university has to spend its own money to maintain nearby properties and keep streetlights lit.

MAYOR OF MIDTOWN

Wayne State's police blitz has helped spur growth across the neighborhood. Ask locals about Midtown's rejuvenation, and they'll be likely to mention the Wayne State alumna Susan Mosey. She is president of Midtown Detroit Inc., a nonprofit group that brings in \$10-million a year through grants and donations to help invest in real-estate projects and drive economic development in the area.

Ms. Mosey, a fast talker, has been nicknamed "mayor of Midtown" for steering the organization's growth. (Her annual salary, about \$200,000, tops that of the mayor of Detroit.)

"Detroit has had a lack of leadership for as long as I've been doing it," she says. "Someone's got to wake up every day, like me, to say, How are we going to make the neighborhood better?"

John Popovich, chief executive of Henry Ford Hospital, called Ms. Mosey a "force of nature" at Midtown Detroit Inc.'s annual meeting, in August.

And she's had success, in large part through linking up with Wayne State, the hospital, and deep-pocketed philanthropies like the Hudson-Webber, Ford, and Kresge Foundations. More than \$2-billion has been put into the area since 2000, with 3,800 new housing units being built. A part of the neighborhood known as the Cass Corridor pitches itself as a beacon for the arts.

Ms. Mosey acknowledges that the area still has a decade to go until its revival is complete. But for now, Midtown Detroit has a big backer in Wayne State, which contributes about \$1-million a year to the group.

"The university has actively pushed this process very aggressively over the years," says Lyke Thompson, director of the university's Center

for Urban Studies. "The university needs to make it happen, ... in order to make sure students and people know, coming to the university, that it's a safe, successful environment."

Midtown's stability might seem fragile amid the city's bankruptcy, which could create some short-term disinvestment, says Ned Staebler, Wayne State's vice president for economic development. "There will be some people who will be hesitant to make an investment because of uncertainty around what's happening," he says. "But anyone already doing business here will realize the bankruptcy hasn't changed anything about how the city works."

UPHILL CLIMB

With manufacturing jobs swallowed up, a 16-percent unemployment rate, and a shrinking population, a quick economic rebound for the entire city is, of course, unlikely.

Wayne State, the largest university in the city, is handcuffed from helping out much, says Edward L. Glaeser, a professor of economics at Harvard University and author of *Triumph of the City*, about urban success.

Wayne State offers Detroit-area residents more access to college than does the University of Michigan, an elite research institution that's a 45-minute drive away, but an "industrial monoculture" in the manufacturing industry has set back the city's education level, he says.

Besides, Wayne State faces its own challenges. Sixty-nine percent of its undergraduates do not earn degrees within six years; among black undergraduates, the figure is 84 percent. Those statistics have affected the university's standing among lawmak-

ers, who have decreased its state funds by 28 percent in the past decade. As a result, the university raised tuition by 8.9 percent this year. Its problems are compounded by an endowment that sits below \$400-million.

"We're doing a mission that's absolutely important in the current American economic experiment, and that's creating social mobility," says Mr. Thompson, of the Center for Urban Studies. "And what we're doing in Midtown is creating a space where that can occur successfully, and where that experiment can enrich a community that's extremely challenged and neglected by national politics. I have no apologies for that."

"Wayne State has been a tremendous blessing for the city. But you just have to recognize the enormous scope of the problem," Mr. Glaeser says. "The thing that would make a difference would be that over 50 years, 1,000 graduates a year from top universities made more start-ups in the city of Detroit. That's the kind of level of intervention I think that an urban tragedy of Detroit's magnitude needs."

Wayne State officials say they are doing what they can. For example, the university has invested \$3-million in M1 Rail, the city's budding streetcar project.

And M. Roy Wilson, who took over as Wayne State's president on August 1 after working as an administrator at the National Institutes of Health and Creighton University, says bolstered student services and admissions requirements will help the university raise its graduation rate and send more graduates into the local economy.

"Detroit is right smack what we do. This is where we live. We are Detroit," Mr. Wilson says. "Certainly if we had a lot more money and a lot bigger endowment, we could do a lot more. But it's in our mission." ■



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