



Meet Officer Rick Salzman: CAN Center's newest member

BY STEPHANIE VALLE AND JOE ARCE

Trading in his blue uniform for a t-shirt and a pair of shorts, KCMO police officer Rick Salzman is the new member of the CAN (Community Action Network) Center.

Following the retirement of well-respected KCMO police officer Matt Tomasic, Salzman is looking forward to work more in depth with the community.

"I'm just eager to get out here and learn. I really want to make a difference. With my previous job, as a patrolman, you didn't get to know people at a personal level and I'm really excited to get to know a lot of people and how we can best help out the community," said Salzman.

Originally from St. Louis, Salzman graduated from Truman State University with a degree in psychology and criminal justice. In 2003, he joined the Kansas City, Missouri police force where he has been patrolling the streets for 13 years. He adds that he is married and has two children.

Before the CAN Center, Salzman was a patrol officer and recalls his typical protocol for responding to a situation would be answering phone calls, then going out and solving the problem or documenting an incident then moving on to the next call.

He revealed that community policing is different from what a typical officer would see. "You have to completely readjust your way of thinking in policing. This is getting to know people on that personal level," explained Salzman.

One of the secrets of KCMO police officer Chato Villalobos and former police officer Matt Tomasic is that they dressed as ordinary people, which often included t-shirts and shorts. This allowed them to gain the trust needed and opened a dialogue with the people that they served. By dressing as civilians, these police officers appear to be more approachable to neighborhood residents.

CAN Center officers work daily with day laborers by providing them the necessary facilities and tools to help improve their lives. This included, but is not limited to setting up the center for community meetings, the installation of a community garden and the removal of graffiti thus creating a safer environment for businesses, residents and the overall community.

Now with his new position at the CAN Center, Salzman will work in conjunction with the community like Villalobos and Tomasic have been. He said, "It has kind of been hectic getting adjusted to the hours and meeting new people. It's a very interesting experience for me because I'm not used to this. It's actually getting to know people at a personal level rather than just dealing with a police emergency then moving on to the next [call]."

He emphasized that with community policing, officers get to "know people on a personal level by actually finding out their needs and getting to follow up with them on a personal level and trying to figure out what is the best solution possible."

Salzman is not alone though, he has been working with Villalobos for the last couple of weeks and has a better understanding of the CAN Center's mission.

Growing up in a Latino home, Salzman is used to and embraces the culture. Even though he admits he is not fluent in Spanish, Salzman is willing to learn the language.

Excited about his new position at the CAN Center, he is anxious to hit the streets in the Westside community and talk to the residents and area businesses that he will be serving. Salzman added, "I have tremendous shoes to fill and I'm going to do the best I can."