

■ DRUGS

An officer of Tampa Police Department's X-ray squad, displays a handful of crack cocaine packets discovered near the College Hills housing community,



College Hill and Ponce de Leon:

A work in progress



■ **FENCED IN** A fence was put up around College Hill and Ponce De Leon housing units in Tampa about four years ago as a deterrent to drug dealers and as a safety barrier for children.

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For more than a dozen years, life at the College Hill and Ponce de Leon housing units in Tampa has been one of slow and progressive change. A steady battle against drugs, crime and violence has been fought utilizing aggressive community policing efforts.

In the mid-1980s, riots and drug trafficking were common place in these "projects," as they are so often referred to by the local residents. Police officers entering the area were often met with bottles, rocks and other hostilities. It was during this time that the Tampa Police Department began its community policing efforts using the X-ray squad.

The department's efforts have been a success in the eyes of some. "We need them and they're right here with us," says local resident Claritha Johnson. "We have some good police. I wouldn't have said that

five years ago."

By Johnson's account, the department's effort have made it a little easier to live. She says the residents don't riot as much as they used to and drug trafficking is down.

The X-ray squad is staffed by about 12 police officers who volunteered for the assignment. For Officer Curtis Smith Jr., it is like patrolling his old stomping grounds.

Smith was raised in an area just outside of the College Hills area. It is his local influence that has enabled him to emerge as a local favorite. Many call him by his nickname, "Tiger."

"I think our constant presence and display of force helps to keep away crime," says Smith. "We try to remain accessible to the people and provide alternatives."

"I like to think that we try to educate and rehabilitate instead of incarcerate."



■ **Above:** Officer Curtis Smith Jr., a member of the Tampa Police Department's X-ray Squad, looks on as College Hill residents Charles Johnson, left, and Tony White play Spades.

■ **Left:** Emanuel Simpson, 2, eats a bag of chips outside of his home at the College Hill housing complex. The efforts of the X-ray Squad have reduced some of the fear in his neighborhood.



■ **Above:** Tampa Police Department X-ray squad's Curtis Smith, Jr., escorts a juvenile back to his vehicle after temporarily detaining him for possible drug trafficking.

■ **Right:** Ellen Bailey holding one of her four children, 8-month-old LeZareia Gilbert, says that though the police station is located within the community, response times can be as long as 20 minutes.



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