

Jeanelle Jarrah

From: Suzie Johnston
Sent: Monday, October 11, 2021 3:35 PM
To: Jeanelle Jarrah
Subject: Fwd: 4th of July Observations

Jeanelle,

Can you please share this letter with the Adhok committee from Flagler County Assist? Since we know not everyone reads them as well have printed for the meeting.

Thank You,

Suzie Johnston
Mayor of City of Flagler Beach
386-338-4110
SJohnston@CityofFlaglerBeach.com

Begin forwarded message:

From: Flagler County Assist <flaglercountyassist@gmail.com>
Subject: 4th of July Observations
Date: October 10, 2021 at 7:34:22 PM EDT
To: <Sjohnston@cityofflaglerbeach.com>

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you some of the observations we have made over the years assisting with the Fabulous 4th of July event in Flagler Beach.

Some background on our organization;

Flagler County Assist was founded in 195 mostly by high school students who wanted to lend a hand using their CB radios. Over the years it has evolved into a professional volunteer service organization which have provided volunteers to numerous public service and emergency events in Flagler County. Among those events has been the Fabulous 4th of July in Flagler Beach. This event has been worked by our volunteers in varying roles since 1986. Our first involvement was assisting with the line up of the parade. Over the years as the event grew we were tasked with traffic control assistance during the parade through the 1980's and into the 1990's.

When the late 1990's rolled around Flagler Beach PD began to request our assistance for traffic control after the conclusion of the event (fireworks) as the crowd steadily increased.

This event is a favorite of mine and of many FCA volunteers. However especially in the last 10 years of so some of our long time volunteers have expressed concerns over their personal safety. Some "near miss" incidents have occurred (see below).

It should be noted that FCA operates with its own communications system so when a message needs to get relayed to FDBP it must go to the FCA controller and then they relay to our liaison so when someone needs help fast there is an extra step in making it happen.

The following are key observations noted by myself and volunteers as far as Flagler County Assist Operations are concerned.

1. The first "crushing" event was in 1999. The previous 4th of July was canceled due to the 1998 Wildfires when the 1999 event came along attendance seemed much higher than before. FCA members were put into traffic control earlier (6 pm) due to the traffic getting gridlocked.
2. Fourth of July I THINK 2007 but could have been 2005 2006 or so, a firework exploded on the beach at South 3rd street. An Ambulance was summoned and we literally had to force traffic onto the shoulders of the road to get them through. Further the incident put us in the intersection alone briefly. There were multiple injuries but nothing serious however the resulting traffic chaos that incident brought with it caused all sorts of issues well into the night.
3. During the 4th of July in 2008 we got another crush of people where we had to activate volunteers early again, Traffic control was needed at 7 pm. During this event multiple fights broke out which used up all law enforcement resources. FCA was tasked directly by FBPD to respond and handle a report of a missing juvenile. Fortunately our volunteers were able to locate the missing child and get them back to their mother. Shortly after FCA was requested again by FBPD to assist with an elderly woman who spoke Russian who lost her Husband. A member was tasked to assist. We requested law enforcement assistance multiple times but none were available due to the multiple fight calls ongoing. The woman we were trying to assist then had a medical emergency in which Flagler EMS (As it was known then) responded and transported to hospital. No law enforcement ever responded to the incident. Traffic congestion was extreme and we did not clear until 0100hrs. This clearing time became the norm from here on out, with the exception of 2010. (see below)
4. In 2011 one of our volunteers was aggressively threatened by a motorist. FBPD had no resources to assist we had to send two of our own volunteers to resolve the situation. This was the start of when we started to encounter road rage where motorists stuck in traffic would get out of vehicles and get in the face of our volunteers. These incidents could continue into the years ahead. During this event one of the officers at the SR 100 and A1A intersection got into a physical altercation with a jaywalker. The resulting disturbance left the intersection with NO traffic control officers. FCA members took on the responsibility alone which went against FCA policy (we do not do traffic on state roads without some official presence from Law Enforcement.
5. Fourth of July 2013 one of our volunteers working SR 100 and A1A was clipped by a passing car and knocked on the ground. Fortunately no injuries, It was also during that event where we had a number of our volunteers verbally threatened where they felt for their safety and even had incidents where people attempted to "take over" traffic control posts assigned by FBPD. This event was so bad that FCA considered no longer supporting it due to the fact many had thought it had become too dangerous to work. I was working S5th and Daytona and an impatient driver of a large pickup truck drove down the sidewalk yelling "F you! as he drove by at a high rate of speed. The concern was if anyone had been walking they could have been hit.

6. After the above incidents, FCA requested during the Fireworks detail that their members be co located at law enforcement posts. For the most part this works but the law enforcement units cannot always stay as they get calls etc.
7. **BIG CHANGES** In 2014 through the efforts of EM Director Kevin Gutherie and newly hired Police Captain Matt Doughney the very first comprehensive planning for the 4th of July was put into force. Planning meetings started months in advance. FBPD said no leave would be allowed during the 4th as it was the largest event in Flagler Beach. The result was one of the best run 4th of July events in years. The vision was to close parts of A1A for pedestrians only as well as one way SR 100. But DOT from what I understand would not allow it. We still had problems but many long time FCA members stated that not only was it much better than 2013 but it was the best one ever worked. We actually cleared near 2330 hrs which was much better than the 0100 hrs timing it once had.
8. 2016,- 2018 the organization of the event got better and more fine tuned. However based on observations the crowds continue to increase. During the parade we had an incident where a person threatened one of our FCA members. FPBD responded quickly and decisively. However it should be noted that improvement of these events required a lot of resources from outside agencies. This in my opinion helped keep the lid on things and if not for the outside support would have been a different outcome. However other problems continued, such as citizens moving protective barricades which in turn allowed for traffic to flow into areas that were pedestrian only. We would have to send our volunteers sometimes to set these barricades correctly only to be confronted by others attempting to drive through.
9. 2016 2019 Even with the outside help and the volunteers just being one or two people short still would cause issues. On the 4th one person could not make it due to an unforeseen injury which would leave a post open, things like that.
10. 2019 shuttle bus parking ran out due to overcrowding. This caused some issues and confusion and contributed to some of the traffic issues. Our volunteers helping with the parade line up ran into problems with parade participants overheating / dehydrating from the heat.
11. 2020 2021 FCA members provided hydration support however were canceled in 2021 due to weather. In the support role of hydration FCA members can utilize their communications and equipment working a much safer role that does not put them into potential confrontation situations

A few key observations

1. This event from the 1980's has gone from a few hundred people along A1A to 10's of thousands especially for the fireworks. In the 1980's a handful of officers at SR 100 and A1A was all that was needed to direct traffic out.
2. There is a clear escalation of things over the past 35 or so years I have been involved in this event. Even though we have much better organization these past few years I think that was a stopgap as the crowds continue to grow each year and with that growth the risks of further incidents.
3. Even though none of our members were involved in any physical altercations, thankfully I am always worried about the "first time" someone gets hit or worse.
4. We love the idea of the event, but in my personal opinion I do not want to see one of our FCA people get hurt just so a bunch of people can drink beer and watch fireworks especially in today's climate.

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Fireworks not on the 4th - FCA has provided traffic support for fireworks during the off 4th of July events

1996-1997 Fireworks were shot off for the Columbus Day event. Traffic was easily managed and no serious incidents occurred

1998 Fireworks went off on Labor Day Weekend (delayed due to 98 fires) it was quite busy but nothing like the 4th

2000 - Fireworks went off at Midnight. 3 FCA volunteers was all that was required to assist with traffic and were able to clear in 20 minutes. There was a fair amount of traffic but nothing to the scale their typically is during the 4th of July

2010 - Fireworks were delayed to Labor Day again busy but we were able to wrap up 2200hrs or so.

In closing FCA will continue to support this and other requests from the City of Flagler Beach as long as the volunteers feel safe to do so and roles that are safe for them to support. The 4th of July is one of the favorite events of the organization, however members have expressed concerns with their own safety due to a few actions from drivers being impatient and aggressive.

I hope this offers some insight on the event over the years and how it has changed and the trend of how things are going. If you have any specific questions please reach out.

Respectfully

Bob Pickering
President
Flagler County Assist Inc.