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Inside the APD

A deeper look at Chief Acevedo and his team shows that along with amped-up technology, their dedication is creating a safer Austin.



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Urban Paradise

Downtown isn't just for night owls anymore. From the Market District to the 2nd Street District, see what the heart of the city has to offer, from residences, bars and shops, to music venues and more. So much fun, so little time.

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Tailor Made

Meet 10 bachelors who are smart, sexy and know the power of a well-made suit. This year's crop of single guys range from entertainers to business owners. Prepare to swoon.

INSIDE the APD

DESPITE MASSIVE SPENDING CUTS,
the city's police force has
REDUCED CRIME IN OUR RAPIDLY
growing area through the use
OF NEW TECHNOLOGY AND THE
hard work of Chief Art Acevedo
AND OTHER DEDICATED OFFICERS

By Anne Lang | Photographs by Bill Sallans

A few hours before dawn on April 6, Austin Police Department Chief Art Acevedo had just fallen asleep following a particularly trying day. That evening, a foot chase during a routine traffic stop culminated in a scuffle between an APD officer and a suspect, who had tried to grab the officer's gun. In response, the officer shot the suspect, who died a short time later.

"My phone rings," Acevedo says, "and the watch commander tells me we've had an officer shot. I'm like, 'Wait a minute. I just came from an officer-involved shooting.'" But this was a new one, with tragically reversed consequences: Officer Jaime Padron, 40, had

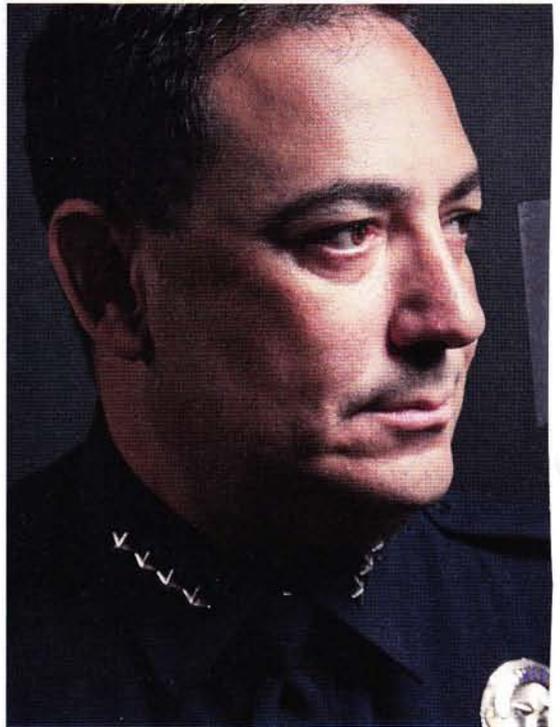
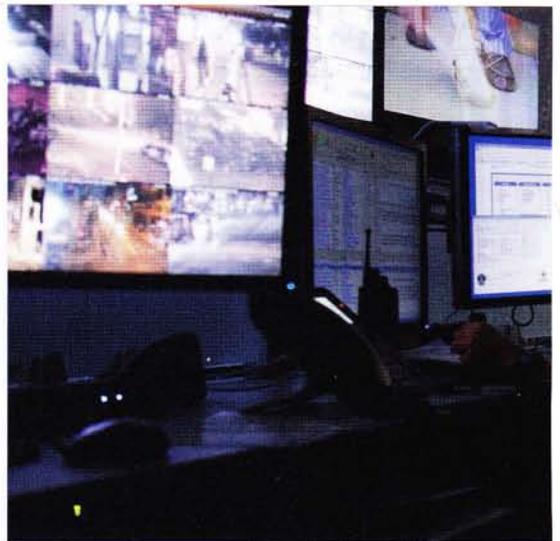
been shot around 2:30 a.m. by a shoplifting suspect at a local Walmart. Padron was currently in transit to Brackenridge Hospital, Acevedo was informed.

"Within five minutes I'm in my uniform and out the door," recalls Acevedo, 48, who in July marked his five-year anniversary as APD's chief. "As I'm leaving the house, the watch commander calls me back and says, 'Chief, I'm sorry, he didn't get transported. He's been pronounced at the scene.'"

For the APD, two officer-involved shootings in less than 24 hours was a rare occurrence, especially in light of recent statistics indicating that Austin's violent-crime rates had dropped by nearly eight percent between 2010 and 2011. While Acevedo is proud of that statistic,

he, like so many Austinites—thousands of whom lined city streets to honor the fallen officer on the day of his funeral—was devastated by Padron's death. But as he's always done, Acevedo headed straight to the scene. "There's nothing worse than seeing a police officer in uniform lying in his own pool of blood," Acevedo says. "But it's something we've seen too often in our careers."

The chief's grim night didn't end when he left the Walmart. From there, he went to break the news to Padron's ex-wife, with whom Padron shared custody of two daughters, ages 10 and 6. "When you have to go and tell somebody that they're not going to see their loved ones again, it's something you never forget," he says. "Especially those





From left: Senior Police Officer Correa; Corporal Coffey; Real Time Crime Center; Chief Acevedo



two beautiful little angels. In the middle of the night, they were awakened by their mommy and told that Daddy was dead. It absolutely tears your heart.”

And Padron, adds Acevedo, was a standout cop. “I’ve got 2,300 employees, and Jaime stood out for all the right reasons,” he says. “When you go to police funerals, they’ll always sound like heroes. But 99 percent of the time, the officers that get killed are our best of the best, because they’re the ones who never try to skirt responsibility, who will always answer that call and who will always be first at the scene. I knew Jaime. He was just a prince, a really special guy.”

Padron was the first APD officer shot and killed in the line of duty since

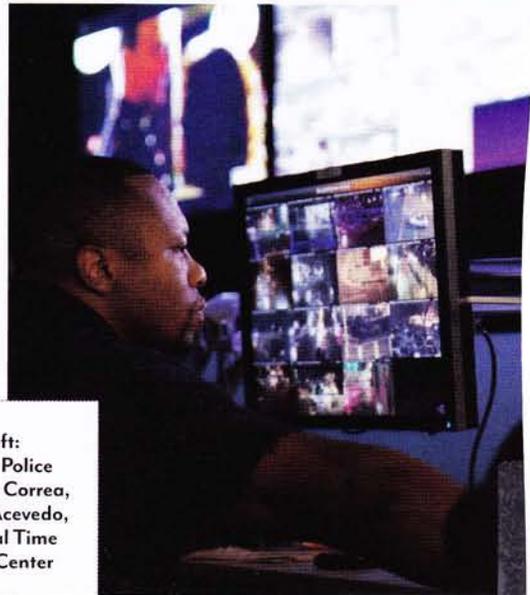
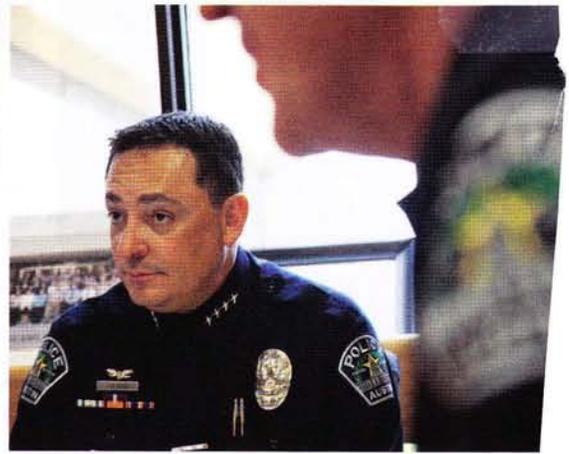
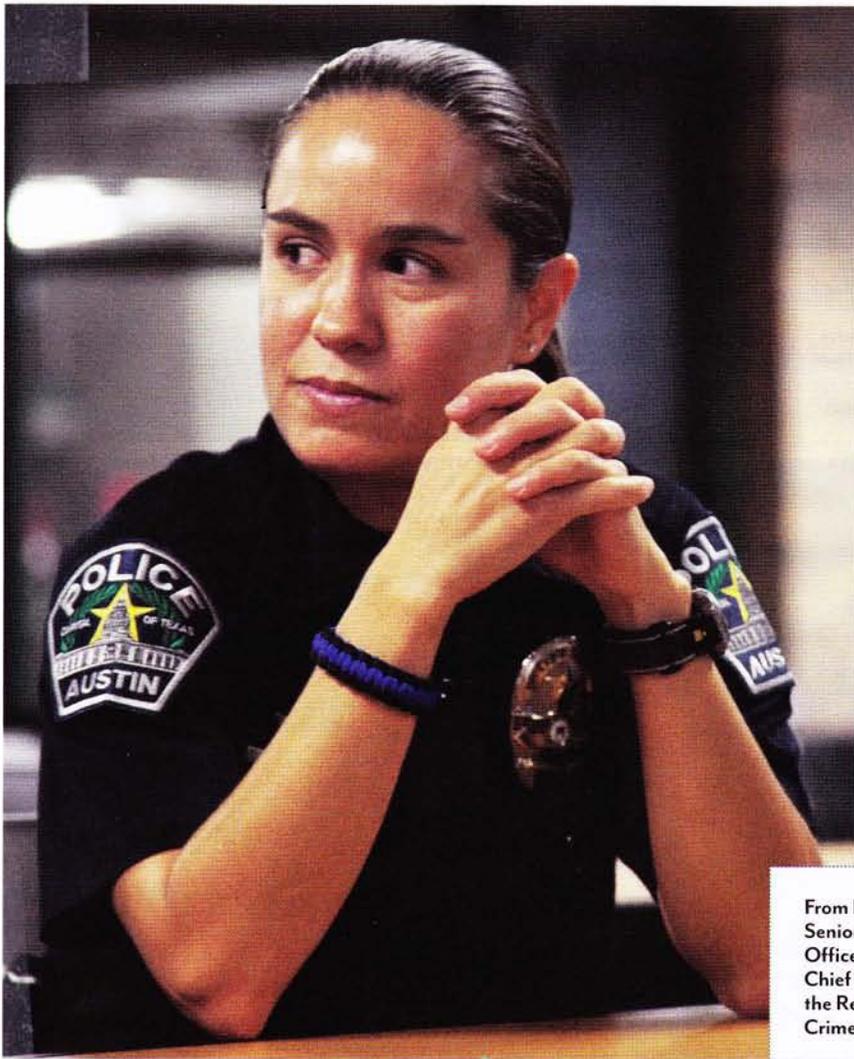
1978—a remarkably long time gap in a city populated by nearly 800,000 people, with a ratio of just two police officers per every 1,000 residents. (The national average is 2.4 officers per 1,000.) And while incidents like the Walmart shooting are horrific, the APD has taken numerous extra steps in recent years to ensure the safety of both its citizens and its officers, primarily through the use of new technology.

CATCHING UP WITH THE TIMES

Perhaps nowhere is modern police technology more evident than at the APD’s Real Time Crime Center, launched in August 2011. Housed in

a large, darkened room in one of the buildings at APD headquarters at Eighth Street and I-35, the center resembles a TV studio control room, with a bank of large flat-screen monitors mounted on one wall.

Under a watch commander’s supervision, several officers scan the wall of screens, which feature live images of historically high-crime areas around the city. The images are transmitted from dozens of APD cameras that have the capability for instant zooming. The staff also keeps an eye on two monitors at each desk that display constantly changing data related to police calls occurring all across the city, and the officers are immediately available to give information (mug shots, arrest records, etc.) as



From left:
Senior Police
Officer Correa,
Chief Acevedo,
the Real Time
Crime Center

requested by their colleagues who are patrolling the streets.

Because of all the sophisticated data and tools at their fingertips, Acevedo says, “we don’t just send officers on patrol to go and cruise around. By crunching data and using the business intelligence that’s available to us, we can almost predict what kind of crime’s going to happen, where it’s going to happen, what time period it’s going to happen in.”

Officer Laura Correa, 36, who is entering her sixth year with the APD, offers a first-hand view of the impact of technology on the department, both as a street-patrol officer and as a recent addition to the Real Time Crime Center team. “In the early days, we had these old Dell laptops, and we actually used floppy disks for saving and transferring our reports to the main report queue,” she says.

“We also used Polaroid cameras for photographing injured citizens. Now we use digital cameras, which means we can download all the great, clear images on our Toughbooks [*removable laptops mounted on patrol-car consoles between the front seats*] instead of having to wait for the Polaroid picture to develop or running out of film.”

The APD has also been steadily making the transition from VHS tapes to digital video in dashboard-mounted cameras, known as D-MAVs. And patrol car Toughbooks include advanced GPS and other useful tools. “We have a complete mobile office on the car computers,” says Correa, who was a street cop on the East Side from the time of her Academy graduation in April 2007 until earlier this year, when she joined the crime center staff.

Other benefits of the cameras are that the officers on duty come to recognize

“regulars” at the various locations, patterns of suspicious behavior and vehicles that are frequently used for drugs. And when a center staffer spots a problem, such as a street fight, they can alert the nearest street-patrol officers to go to the scene. “You have a better idea of who you’re looking for,” says Correa, who juggles motherhood (she has a 3-year-old son) with her night shifts. “And you’re able to pull up mug shots and warrants. If someone gives you a fake name, usually that fake name has warrants attached to it. It gives us so much more information, which allows us to be more fluid with everything because everything is in one place.”

APD is also a part of the Austin Regional Intelligence Center, which opened in December 2010. Defined as a “fusion center” that’s similar to others throughout the United States, the ARIC was created as a way for more than 40

law enforcement agencies in Travis, Hays and Williamson counties to more efficiently share information on all levels of ongoing or suspected crime. The overall scope of the ARIC, which was originally started with funding from the Department of Homeland Security, ranges from local and national crime to terrorism.

Acevedo also lists electronic license-plate readers and Blue Check devices as useful technological tools for the APD. "We're just working a lot smarter," he says.

A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

While technology is obviously a large contributor to the reduction of local crime statistics, there also are times when releasing footage captured by D-MAVs causes controversy, which sometimes leads to policy introspection by the APD. One example: In April, a dog named Cisco was fatally shot by APD Officer Thomas Griffin, who had been responding to a domestic-disturbance call. Mistakenly arriving at the wrong address, Griffin claims he acted in self-defense when Cisco, who lived at that erroneous address, reportedly charged him in an aggressive manner.

The video of Cisco's shooting went viral, first on Facebook and then on You-

Tube, receiving thousands of hits from people all over the world, most of them outraged at what they perceived was an unnecessary act on Griffin's part. "You know, we weren't required to release that video," says Acevedo. "We did it in the interest of transparency. But some people are only going to see what they want to see, and hear what they want to hear. That video doesn't show what Cisco the dog did or didn't do, or what the officer saw or didn't see. That video is only part of the story. I want people to just think for a minute, to remove the emotion, and think: 'What made an officer shoot a dog? Is it because the officer perceived that the dog was going to come up and lick him?' I don't think so."

Not long after the shooting, it was revealed that the dog had a history with Austin Animal Control, which included two complaints of aggressive behavior, including a woman who reported Cisco bit her in 2007. Regardless, Acevedo is trying to take away lessons from the unfortunate shooting. "This incident gave us an opportunity to look at our processes, because whether we did everything right or wrong, we want to know what we did right and what we could do better," he says. "And I think we'll end up with some process improvements and some training improvements. But at the end of the day, I think we're going to

find out that the officer probably acted appropriately, based on the totality of the circumstances."

MONEY MATTERS

Another big challenge the APD has had to deal with is spending cuts, which the city has encouraged. Through severe belt-tightening, the police department saved \$4.7 million in 2011 and \$7.7 million in 2010.

"We've given back millions of dollars every year," Acevedo says. "That was by design, not by accident. I told these guys when I took this job that we'd be tightening our belts immediately, because we were perceived as being wasteful as an organization. And I'll be honest, we *did* waste a lot of money [*before he came*]. And if you take away a million bucks, people scream that the sky is going to fall. But you've never heard this police department say that in the last five years."

Acevedo says one of the payoffs has been to empower his commanders to manage their respective departmental budgets. "But we've also held them accountable," he adds, "so they're the landlords of their areas of operation. We don't go over budget."

He also hopes that the residents of Austin can see that the APD is a very





Corporal Coffey (below left) teaches combat tactics to other police officers.



» AUSTIN CRIME BY THE NUMBERS «

A look at the data released in the 2011 Annual Crime and Traffic Report

| | 2010 | 2011 | PERCENTAGE CHANGE |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------------------|
| HOMICIDES: | 38 | 27 | -28.9% |
| BURGLARIES: | 8,749 | 7,042 | -19.5% |
| RAPE: | 265 | 211 | -20.4% |
| ROBBERIES: | 1,231 | 1,106 | -10.2% |
| AGGRAVATED ASSAULTS: | 2,256 | 2,126 | -5.8% |

lean organization. “I really believe that we have shown the business justification and the value for every dollar that we get from the city and from taxpayers,” he says.

And Acevedo is keenly aware that if the APD raised its staffing ratio to 2.4 officers per every 1,000 residents, “that would give me 450 more cops,” he says. “You give me 450 more cops, and if I don’t knock the snot out of crime, then you’d need to find yourself another police chief. But I’m not advocating for that, because I understand that the city has other needs: the parks need money, the libraries need money, we need money for roadways. As long as I’m showing the value to the taxpayer



and to the residents, the business community and the political leaders of this city, we shouldn't back away from something that's worked."

TRADITIONS HAVE THEIR PLACE

While no one can deny that modern technology has helped lower crime rates and streamlined the day-to-day efforts of APD officers, that doesn't mean cops can let go of their old tried-and-true tactics, such as remaining fit.

Corporal John Coffey, 52, is an adamant proponent of officers maintaining tiptop physical shape at all times, particularly those on daily patrol. The

veteran cop says his own physical training has always served him well, dating back to when he was a rookie and had to fight off five people in a brawl on Sixth Street—by himself. Coffey went on to become a trained expert in use-of-force, combat tactics and survival skills. He passed along that knowledge as an academy instructor for six years during the 1990s, and today he conducts similar sessions with APD rookies during evening shifts at the police gym.

"You just never know" is the mantra of Coffey, a married father of four grown daughters who's been with the APD since 1986. "You can work for 16 years and never be involved in a shooting, or you can be like one young Austin

officer who had only been here six months and was involved in a shooting," he says. "So that's why we all need to be in the gym working out, running on the track and practice-shooting on the range, over and over, every day. Because you just never know."

Coffey does credit technology and the new ways of documenting and reporting crimes for contributing to Austin's lowered crime rates. "But I can also say that after 26 years, when there's a problem out there that needs to be fixed, sending a cop to the scene is what fixes it," he says, "whether it's a dealer selling dope next to your house, someone breaking into your home or gang activity. Cops make a difference, every day." ■