



Chief Peter M. Carey is a career New York State University Police Officer with Buffalo State College for over 37 years; serving as Chief of Police for the past 10 years. Peter earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Buffalo State College, a Juris Doctor degree from the University at Buffalo Law School and is a licensed attorney. Chief Carey served as an Adjunct Faculty at Buffalo State College for fourteen years teaching criminal justice. In 2012, Chief Carey led the college's effort to receive New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services Police Department Accreditation. He has earned over 15 awards, including being named the 2017 Campus Safety Director of the Year (Higher Education) from Campus Safety Magazine.

## **Tell us about yourself and your ties to Buffalo State College.**

I got my Bachelor's degree from Buffalo State. I've been here over 37 years working for University Police. I started out as a police student assistant, then became a university police officer, then became a lieutenant, investigator, and Assistant Chief before being promoted to Chief almost ten years ago. I tell students at orientation that the building they are staying in is one that I also stayed in.

## **What is most challenging about your job?**

Managing technology, keeping it current, and trying to select solutions that help is difficult. There's a lot of software and equipment out there so trying to look at how to utilize equipment and technology to enhance your job rather than getting it just to have another piece of equipment is important. Whatever you get, you'll have to maintain it going forward and budget for it, so it can be challenging.

I think the other challenge is regulatory compliance with federal regulations like the Clery Act and the Enough Is Enough law. You can implement policies to be sure you are compliant, but on the back end, there's the documentation and proof. As years go by, there's more regulatory compliance that takes time and effort. It's tough but it's important. When I attend student orientation and a parent asks a question, it's much better to not only be able to answer the question and assure we are doing things right, but to be able to prove it. So the benefit of the documentation makes you sure you are compliant and can prove it.

Although it is a significant amount of work, there is a benefit.

## **How are emergency communications handled at Buffalo State College?**

As part of our accreditation, we have a policy within our department for emergency communications, but our college overall has an emergency response plan. Within that, we have an emergency communications plan.

Our College Relations department handles emergency communications by utilizing Omnilert and the different methods it provides to get our messaging out. When an emergency takes place, we feel that expecting the police to send the message is not the best practice - we should be handling the emergency. So when something takes place, the officers on duty are handling it and they notify the Assistant Chief or me and then we work with the College Relations department to get them the information and they handle the messaging. So after we are informed, we get the facts about what needs to be put out, give it to College Relations, and then we are back to handling the emergency. College Relations takes care of the notification process and it works out well. There are multiple people in that department who can send the messages, so we aren't relying on one person to send a message and get it done. But, we also are trained and have the capability to do it ourselves if needed.

## **What encouraged the implementation of an emergency notification system?**

As the technology became more available and it was becoming

the standard in higher education and other institutions, we looked towards adopting an ENS system. We first started using New York Alert, which is through the New York State's government, and that's what we and many other state university campuses were using. It was free, it was part of the New York State infrastructure, and it was a general software that was used by municipalities. It is a basic, one size fits all, messaging system.

As time went on, its capabilities and inflexibility led us to the decision that we had to go to another system that had more features, personalization, and campus specific controls-- that's how we ended up using Omnilert. New York Alert is a good system, but we just wanted to be able to do more. Omnilert integrates with our messaging boards, our cable TV network, and everything else. So as all that technology was available, and we had the infrastructure here on campus, we needed something that could handle all of that easily.

### **When have you had to use Omnilert?**

We use Omnilert to notify the community about sexual assault cases, robberies, or other incidents-- which doesn't happen often, but we need the capability. We've had total campus power outages, and the most frequent thing we use it for, being in Buffalo, NY, is to cancel classes due to weather.

We use all the different endpoints but we always use the text messaging option. We use digital signage, desktop alerts, social media platforms, emails, and more. Omnilert allows us to send a message to all of them or to select just a few.

### **How do you and your team prepare for an emergency?**

Buffalo State has an emergency response planning group that

includes me; Campus Services; Environmental Health and Safety; our Vice President, and if a medical emergency occurs, the Director of the Health Center. We have an emergency response plan that is reviewed, and we do annual drills with our department, the Buffalo Fire Department, the NY State fire department, along with our community members, Resident Life, student assistants, and others. We simulate fires, conduct active shooter trainings and exercises, and conduct tabletop exercises. We've got a very good program and good relationship with first responders in the area, as well as the volunteers working with our community emergency response team.

### **What has been the biggest challenge regarding emergency preparedness and communication initiatives?**

We've done it well, but with each incident, information may take time to come in so a well-crafted, very informative message may not be available right at the beginning. In those cases, we have to get a bare-bones message out letting people know an incident has taken place, and then we update later on. Trying to figure out when to send a message with the information that you have at the time so it's appropriate for the situation is challenging.

Scenarios® is something we hope to start utilizing within our Omnilert account to enhance the speed and efficiency of our messaging. We are always looking for better and more efficient ways to communicate - the biggest criticism you see when it's happened across the country is, "how quickly did you get the message out?". So we are trying to improve our ability to deliver a quick notification while still having an appropriate message to go out so people are informed regarding what has taken place and what measures of safety we want them to take.

### **What advice would you give similar organizations?**

Regardless of the Clery Act and other laws, the guiding principle is to do what's best for your community as quickly as possible. Get the information out and have the endpoints integrated to do it, like what Omnilert provides us. I think most colleges and universities have the technology and infrastructure to do it well, so it's making the choice to do it well.

When our President first came here one of the things she was interested in was our emergency response. We informed her about what we do and she wanted herself and her team to be involved and participate in tabletop exercises. It comes from the top with good leadership and our President has done that. It sends a message to everyone else that emergency response and communications is an important issue when it comes from the top. People are then willing to take the time and energy to work with us to try to do it well. 🌍

Buffalo State College is part of the State University of New York System. There are 29 campuses throughout New York State with the New York State University Police at all SUNY campuses. Buffalo State has roughly 10,000 students, roughly 1,800 employees, and several thousand visitors a day for business and activities on campus.

Each campus operates and funds its own PD within the State University Police. Buffalo State has 33 sworn personnel comprised of 25 officers, 4 lieutenants, 2 investigators, the Assistant Chief, and Chief Carey. They have 2 civilian dispatchers, 1 security services assistant, and also employ 55 students as University Police student assistants to help provide escort van services and routine security and visibility.