



Edison Township's 'Finest' line up for Memorial Day inspection—in 1935.

## Police Began in 1923 with Model 'T'

Edison Township's Police Department has come a long way from 1923 when the original force consisted of four men and a Model "T" Ford.

During these early years of the Roaring '20s, some patrolmen rode motorcycles which had sidecars, and many persons under arrest made the trip to the one-room station house in such an open vehicle in freezing weather.

Originally housed in a small 24-by-36 foot cement building

which stood behind St. James Episcopal Church on what is known today as the "Old Commons," police headquarters consisted of two cells, the courtroom and police facilities, all jammed into the one room structure.

By 1928, the department moved to another building on the Commons, the old schoolhouse which stood about 100 feet from the first headquarters. But there wasn't much of an improvement in

the accommodations, again restricted to one room.

Early morning routine duties for policemen in those days included stoking the furnace and sweeping the floor, recalls Chief John Ellmyer Jr. "I have to laugh when I think back to the car we had without heaters in freezing weather," he reminisced. "It would have been absurd for us to ask for heaters. Today my boys want air conditioners."

The onset of the Depression brought an abrupt halt to municipal construction except for the Piscatawaytown Sewage Treatment Plant which was made mandatory by the state and backed by federal aid.

During this same bleak economic period, federal funds made possible the construction of the first two units of Township Hall, where the police force has made its headquarters since 1941.

But the main complaint raised today by police officials is still one of inadequate space.

Ellmyer said the department, now 104-men strong, with a 175-man auxiliary force formed during World War II, and five civilian workers, has been working in cramped quarters at municipal building for years. And there is no immediate relief in sight.

"We've had land earmarked for police headquarters on Route 27 near Talmadge Road for years," the chief commented, "but we've been told by township officials there is no money in the township's budget for at least another four years to building such a facility."

Ellmyer estimated such a new headquarters would cost about \$1 million.

Ellmyer succeeded former Chief Charles P. Grand-Jean, one of the original four men on the force — following Grand-

Jean's retirement in 1959. Ellmyer feels the department is in good shape except for crowded facilities.

Ellmyer subdivided the department into four divisions — detective, juvenile, traffic control and uniformed patrolmen — as a means of improving the force's effectiveness. Each division is headed by a police captain, and supported by 20 patrol vehicles, and two maintenance trucks.

Ellmyer also instituted a tactical police squad back in the mid-1960s. Comprised of about 40 men, the unit is trained to cope with public disorders and emergencies, and is equipped with riot-control equipment. The police chief indicated he intends to enlarge the unit's scope to include the entire department.

As Edison's population shifted from a Depression era census figure of less than 15,000 to the current estimate of 75,000 persons, the township's physical makeup underwent major changes with new housing and industries sprouting up following the end of World War II.

With these changes came additional problems for police in terms of the amount of protection which must be extended to residents and business alike.

"There is a problem with drugs in the township," Ellmyer said, "but exactly to what extent cannot be determined because of the way pushers operate."

Actually, the number one problem in Edison and across the nation is house break-ins, Ellmyer continued. The chief attributed this trend to the sharp increase in dope addicts who cannot work because of their addictions and must resort to break-ins to acquire funds to feed their expensive habit.



# Service started back in Edison's small-town days

By **ANTHONY A. GALLOTTO**  
News Tribune Staff Writer

NT 11/21/89

**EDISON** Joseph N. Shirley stood behind a podium last week, and tried to recall the names of people he thought more deserving of an award he sheepishly clutched.

Shirley, who retired as Edison police captain and retired as the township's director of emergency management, is the first recipient of the John F. Kennedy Medical Center's Community Service Award.

A plaque was presented to Shirley by Michael T. Kornett, the hospital's president and chief executive officer, at a hospital dinner last Thursday.

"Everytime I look at this award, I'll see a hundred different names and faces," Shirley said. "I'm accepting it, but on their behalf."

In the hospital auditorium were more than two dozen well-wishers and friends, most of them police officers, firefighters, and first aid squad officials.

Shirley was born in Edison's Lindeneau section, and attended the Piscatawaytown School. One of his earliest experiences with crime came at age 5 or 6, he said, when he found out that one of his best childhood friends stole his Tom Mix-style toy cowboy gun.

The thief, Richard J. Kermes, grew up to be Edison's chief of police. Years later, it was Shirley who convinced Kermes to join the police department, the chief said.

After Shirley's graduation from Highland Park High School, he went into the Army where he learned photography.

After being discharged, Shirley worked as a research photographer for Mack Motors Inc., Plainfield, and applied to the police department when the firm announced plans to move out of state.

Appointed to the department in 1960 by then-Mayor Anthony M. Yelencsics, he first served under the late Chief John Ellmyer, whose nephew Robert Ellmyer, now a police officer, has replaced Shirley as emergency management director.

"Things were a lot simpler in those days," Shirley said, of the 37-man police force he joined. There are now 183 officers and patrolmen.

For example, "there weren't as many hotels or motels in Edison, so if a family from out of town was involved in a car accident or the victims of a crime, I'd call my wife, Marilyn, and ask her to get out extra sheets. They'd be staying," he said.

Shirley was a patrol officer for four years, and worked in traffic safety after that. In 1967, Shirley said he "became the police crime lab: It was a one-man department and I was it." Shirley's photography skills, and a number of courses he took in the collection and preservation of evidence at crime scenes, came in handy.

By the time he retired in September, he headed the staff of what is now called the department's Bureau of Criminal Investigations.



**JOSEPH N. SHIRLEY**

Recipient of community service award

As the emergency management director, Shirley showed up to coordinate almost every major disaster from chemical spills to a recent plane crash off Woodbridge Avenue.

"It wasn't unusual for him to work 60 hours a week or more," Kermes said. "He never knew how to say 'No.' Sometimes I think, he was much too nice to be a cop."

"Police officers owe something to the community they serve," Shirley said. "They must be exemplary, and their family must be exemplary. There are plenty of things my kids couldn't do because I was a cop."

"You always have to remember that what your family does reflects on you and what you do reflects on your family," he said.

His family is very important to him.

Shirley and his wife, Marilyn, are remaining in Edison for now, but eventually will move to Davenport, N.Y., near Cooperstown.

His daughters, Patty Donato and Diane Borwegen will remain in the area.

Shirley's son, Joseph Jr. — a former Edison High School football player — is recuperating from a college football injury. He is a freshman at Northeastern University in Boston.

Shirley, for 30 years, used his photography skills at Edison High School games to record the action. He retired from that volunteer job in June after his son graduated.

"To show their gratitude, the school gave me a wooden plaque that is adorned with pins from every sports team and cheerleading squad," Shirley said. "I'm finally a letterman. It's my most treasured award."

NOT TO BE TAKEN  
FROM LIBRARY

ASK AT DESK

Edison Twp. Pub. Library  
340 Plainfield Ave.  
Edison, N. J. 08817

Edison: Police Dept.



# Rabbi's there for the Edison police

## New chaplain hopes to help solve problems

By ELIAS HOLTZMAN  
News Tribune Staff Writer

Jew, Catholic, or Protestant — doesn't matter to Rabbi Bernhard Rosenberg, who is the new chaplain of the Division of Public Safety in Edison. "I'm not coming here to preach," Rosenberg said. "I'm here to help. If someone has a problem, I'll be there to listen."

His mission is to help people of all faiths.

"Some have said they don't understand what a rabbi is doing as a chaplain for a police department. There are not that many Jewish members of the department."

"I'm not coming here as a rabbi," stresses Rosenberg. "I'm coming here as a human being, trained in sensitivity and stress management."

Since his appointment, Rosenberg has been introducing himself to members of the Edison police department.

"I tell them that as a chaplain, it will be at their wish. I'll be there to help."

"I'm really honored by this appointment. I take it very seriously."

If the post turns out as he imagines, he will be reaching out to the police and police reserves; the fire department; and volunteer, the first aid squad; and crossing guards.

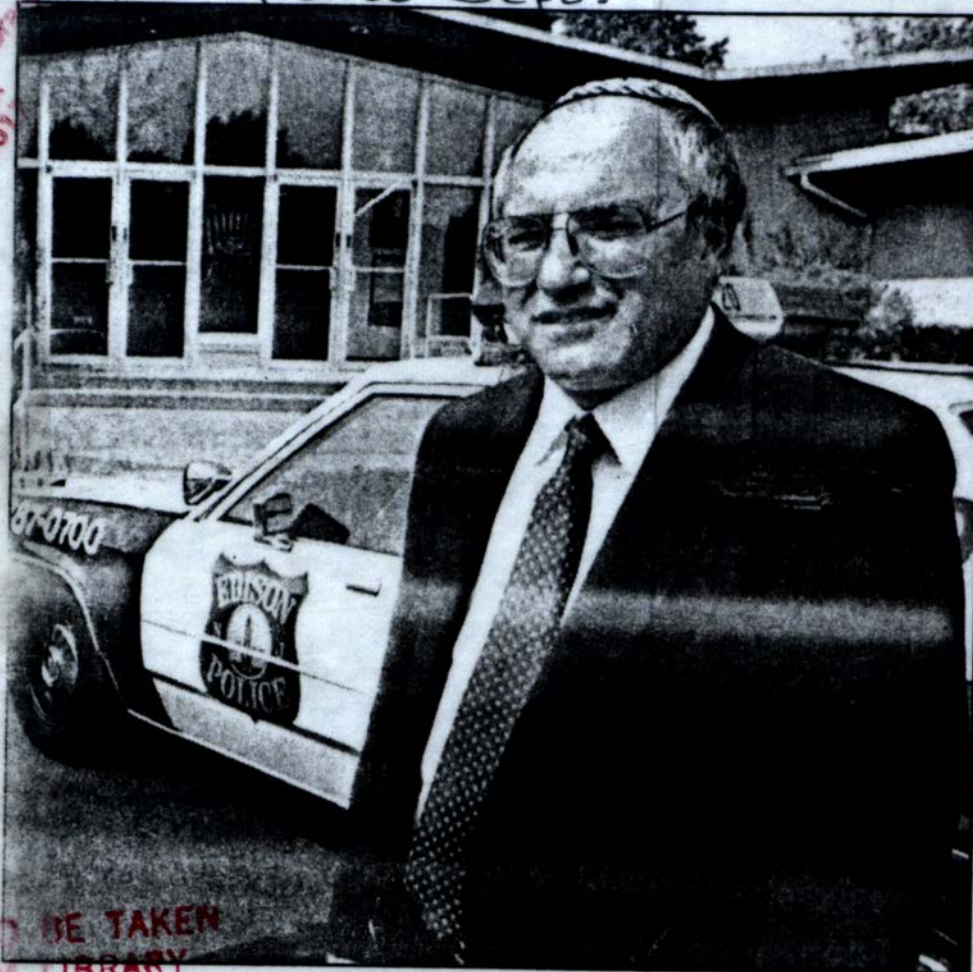
Rosenberg, the rabbi at Conservative Temple Beth El in Edison, believes a chaplain has much to offer in such stress jobs.

"I've got a lot of admiration for all the people who put their lives on the line," Rosenberg said. "I'm really asking the community to rally around them. We need our support."

One of his goals, Rosenberg said, is to interest the clergy of other faiths as psychologists and others in sensitivity training and stress management, to assist police and others in the department of public safety.

He has the confidence of Mayor Convery, who recommended the appointment in mid-May, and Peter J. [Name obscured], the new director of public safety.

Edison: Police Dept.



Rabbi Bernhard Rosenberg of Temple Beth El is the new chaplain for the Division of Public Safety in Edison.

MATT RAINEY/The News Tribune

ASK AT DESK

Convery had seen Rosenberg at a Holocaust program, and was impressed. He was further impressed when Rosenberg approached him and offered his services as chaplain, citing his interest and his background.

"We need volunteers," said Convery. "We're doing a big volunteer push. We couldn't exist in Edison without volunteers."

Barnes agreed on the need for volunteers: "[Rosenberg] can be a fulcrum for others, who could volunteer for public service."

"He's also got quite a background in law enforcement," Barnes added.

Prior to coming to Edison to be the rabbi at Conservative Temple Beth El at 91 Jefferson Boulevard almost two years ago, he was rabbi at the Midchester

Jewish Center in Yonkers.

While in Yonkers he was a Jewish chaplain for a regional police entity known as the Metropolitan Police Conference, which had 65,000 members.

Rosenberg has had experience in human relations and sensitivity training both in his practice as a rabbi and in psychology and related courses required toward his other degrees.

He expects to put on programs on the religious beliefs and different denominations of those who serve in the Division of Public Safety.

Rosenberg said that he will be "laid back" initially in his approach to contacting the full membership of the public safety department, although he expects meetings to be set up where he will speak.

"I want it to come from them," he said.

Rosenberg also is an adjunct professor at Rutgers in New Brunswick, teaching a course in public speaking twice a week.

In addition to being an ordained rabbi, Rosenberg, who is 42, has two degrees from Yeshiva University in New York, in speech and communication, and in education. He also is completing his doctorate in administration and supervision.

He and his wife, Charlene, have four children, ranging in age from 10 months to 8 years.

Lt. Richard Kluj, director of planning and research for the Edison Police Department, sees Rabbi Rosenberg's appointment as a "welcome addition," and noted that there had been honorary police chaplains before, but never one for the entire division of public safety.

Rosenberg emphasized that he is at the very beginning of his appointment, and will have to see how things develop.

He does not expect to be chasing fire engines, or going out on police calls, he said, but he will be on call when needed.

What would he do, he was asked, if there were a conflict and he was required at the scene of fire, or a police emergency, and it is on the Jewish sabbath, which begins at sundown each Friday and lasts through Saturday night.

"I will not break the Sabbath," he said.

"If I am really needed, they can send a police car to the synagogue or to my home and I will do whatever is necessary."

Rosenberg also has appeared on WWOR and Channel 9 when he is called upon to speak on the religious perspective of events.

He is an author, and has a book coming out this summer, called "The Theological Implications of the Holocaust," published by the Ktav Publishing Co.

At Temple Beth El, he is proud of a recent honor the Sisterhood took, in increase in membership, which has jumped 30 to 35 per cent. Many of the new members are younger families, he notes.

"Now we're really growing," he says. "It has a lot to do with reaching out to the community."

At the temple, he says, his main themes are "love of mankind, love of community, and outreach."

And while he won't preach, it's the same kind of message he'll be carrying in his new chaplaincy.





—Photos courtesy of Edison Police Department

At one time, Edison was more rural than it is today as evidenced by the trafficless and barren appearance of Route 1 (above, left). And subsequently, its police force was much smaller than today, as can be seen in the Memorial Day 1929 photograph (above, right).

Edison Twp. Pub. Library  
340 Plainfield Ave.  
Edison, N. J. 08817

## Edison force has grown from four men, old Ford

Edison Twp. Pub. Library  
340 Plainfield Ave.  
Edison, N. J. 08817

NOT TO BE TAKEN  
FROM LIBRARY

By Les Marsh

EDISON — "Help, Police!" That call, today, still musters an instant response from any number of the large, well-equipped, highly trained team of Edison's law enforcement professionals.

The calls range from the "lock-out" calls of absent-minded motorists who lock their keys in their cars to those from neighboring communities seeking the assistance of the department's Tactical Squad to quell a large disturbance.

Readers of the "Police Log" are reminded of the many times and the many ways in which we cry "Help, Police!" today.

A "typical" day will involve the investigation of and the assistance at motor vehicle accidents, robberies, domestic disturbances, reports of missing persons, muggings, shopliftings, reports of prowlers, burglar alarms, undercover operations and more.

The Edison Police Department has come a long way from 1923 when the original force was comprised of four men and a Model-T Ford.

Housed in a one-room headquarters, a 24-by-36-foot structure on The Commons in the Piscatawaytown Historic District, were two jail cells, the courtroom and the police facilities.

Early reports indicate that "some patrolmen rode motorcycles which had sidecars, and many persons under arrest made the trip to the one-room station house in such an open vehicle in freezing weather."

In 1928, the department moved to the old Town Hall — no more than 100 feet from their original facility and community meeting room. It fell victim to a suspicious fire in the late 1920s and was razed.

It is recorded that "early morning routine duties for policemen (in the 1920s) included stoking the furnace and sweeping the floor." Although there were plans to move Police Headquarters to newer and larger facilities elsewhere, the Great Depression took its toll on the municipal budget and municipal construction projects.

The plans for a new building were shelved, and the police had to make do with their cramped quarters in old Town Hall until WPA funds were made available in 1941 for the construction of the first portion of the Raritan Township Municipal Building at the corner of Plainfield and Wood-

bridge avenues. This building still stands and serves today as the home of the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School.

There were plans, in the 1960s, to establish a separate building for the Police Department on

Route 27 near Talmadge Road. Estimates for construction of such a facility, according to then-Chief of Police John Ellmyer were placed at \$1 million.

These plans, too, were shelved and the Police continued to work in their cramped quarters from 1941 until the township's new Municipal Complex was formally dedicated on May 24, 1981. In 1970, records showed that the department was "104 men strong, with a 175-man Auxiliary Force formed during World War II, and five civilian workers."

Always keeping abreast of changes in the township's growing population and changing criminal behavioral patterns, the Edison Township Police Department has a history of excellence, bravery and innovation.

According to the history, "Chief Ellmyer succeeded former Chief Charles P. Grand-Jean, one of the original four men on the force, following Grand-Jean's retirement in 1959. Ellmyer subdivided the department into four divisions — Detective, Juvenile, Traffic Control and Uniformed Patrolmen — as a means of improving the force's effectiveness. Each division was headed by a police Captain and supported by 20 patrol vehicles and two maintenance trucks."

Today's Police Department is a complex one encompassing such diverse functions as: emergency management coordination, the tactical squad, a mobile criminal investigation unit and team, training, communications units and traffic safety.

The nearly 200 men and women who make up the Edison Township Police Department we know today draw upon their extensive and ongoing professional training and no less on the proud legacy passed on to them by those original four men, a motorcycle and side car, a Model-T and the one-room police station of the 1923 police force.

Les Marsh is a member of the Edison Township Historical Society, and this article is one in a series by society members on the history of the area.



For most of its existence, the Edison Police Department has had to operate out of cramped headquarters, so to speak. Its second headquarters (above) was the old Town Hall, which stood on the commons behind St. James Episcopal Church, and it later moved and was housed in a portion of the Raritan Township Municipal Building (below), which still stands at the corner of Woodbridge and Plainfield avenues as the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School.

