



# Keeping An Eye On Novi

VIPS team members provide added layer of safety for residents

For a few hours every week, Claudia and Brent Hammond patrol the streets of Novi.

They wear uniforms and drive around in a city-owned vehicle, monitoring the parks and conducting perimeter checks for the Novi Home Watch program. They're familiar with code enforcement, and they're authorized to issue handicap parking tickets.

Claudia and Brent are VIPS, a new volunteer group that provides yet another presence in Novi to keep residents safe.

"We live in a smaller subdivision here

in Novi, and we feel very safe here because almost everyone knows everyone else," Claudia said. "We're not in each other's business by any means, but you know when there's a stranger in your neighborhood. It's always a good feeling knowing someone is looking out for you."

VIPS, or Volunteers in Public Safety, currently has about 33 members who work in pairs during four-hour shift patrols. The mission of the program is to "Observe, Report and Educate." The idea is to inform residents about city codes and regulations – without creating a

confrontation.

"The department and the community get a lot of out of it," said Novi Police Sgt. Pat Fanning, who helped implement the program in 2016. "I also think it's very enjoyable for the people who join the team – they develop friendships with other team members, they're excited to be there and they want to help."

To qualify for the program, volunteers must be over the age of 21 and possess a valid Michigan driver's license. They must pass a background check and have no criminal convictions. Some training is required to write parking tickets.

Claudia and Brent Hammond moved into Novi in 1980, and have always been involved with the community through schools and the scouts. The retired couple learned about VIPS after attending a Coffee with a Cop event and meeting Sgt. Fanning.

"We do it in spirit of cooperation," Brent said. "If we find someone who appears to be illegally parked in a handicapped space, we usually try to locate the person and issue them a warning."



Claudia Hammond said it's a good feeling to know she is helping keep Novi safe.



VIPS team members perform home watch checks when residents are out of town.

## OFFERING A HAND

VIPS member Evan Lacy typically patrols with a regular partner on Saturday afternoons.

"We're pretty much meant to be goodwill ambassadors for the city and put ourselves where there are people," Lacy said. "Let's say we go to a park and there's a big tournament – lacrosse or soccer or baseball – we'll patrol the area and make ourselves available to the public if anyone needs directions or wants to know the nearest place to grab a bite to eat."

Lacy first started volunteering with the city in 2009 as a member of the Community Emergency Response Team. The Commerce Township resident is the second-generation owner of the Lacy Tool Company, Inc. on Grand River. His father and brother started the tool shop in 1956. Lacy said over the years, he's developed a solid relationship with many of the city employees. He was the police department's Volunteer of the Year in 2016.

"I've been around a long time, and I've always respected the job that the employees of the city do. They do a great job, and I can see where they can use a hand," he said.

## SECURITY AND SMILES

Police departments around the country are initiating anti-crime programs to provide their communities with another layer of security. The programs serve an important role, plus they help bridge stronger relationships between residents and public safety.

"It's refreshing," Sgt. Fanning said. "These folks put in their

own time – the best group of people to train are the people who want to be in the room. They're excited to participate and their positive attitude is contagious. Personally, I get a lot of satisfaction from working with them."

Brent Hammond said the biggest part of the job is to look for anything out of the ordinary. Being visible in the community helps out, too.



*Claudia and Brent Hammond pose for a photo with a man who was thanking them for writing a ticket for a person who was parked illegally in a handicap spot. The man's wife is an amputee and they often see people parked in spots illegally.*

"We're driving a black-and-white patrol car that's official looking," he said. "So just by patrolling through the parks, people who might be engaging in something that's not acceptable will see us and move on."

Lacy, a father of four grown children, said he appreciates the fact that he's freeing up public safety for more important tasks.

"Things happen," he said. "Just being an extra set of eyes and ears for the community is a nice feeling. This is a great area to live in, and we're doing our part to keep it that way."

More often than not, the VIPS members come across residents who just want to shake their hand and let them know they're appreciated.

"We work in the capacity of trying to educate the community," Claudia said. "If we see a person walking their dog off leash, we'll remind them about the city's leash law. We'll contact code enforcement if we see graffiti or excessive garbage in a yard. The work is serious, but it isn't hard. And you learn so much about the community, it's amazing."

To learn more about volunteer community opportunities, such as VIPS or CERT, visit the City of Novi website at [cityofnovi.org](http://cityofnovi.org).



*Brent and Claudia Hammond investigate smoke in the air while out on one of their shifts.*