

What is the International Police Association?

So what is this thing called the International Police Association, the IPA? No, this IPA is not the Illinois Police Association nor the Idaho, Indiana or Iowa Police Association. It's not a state organization. It's not the company that hires you and sends you to help police distressed foreign areas. The IPA is the oldest and largest police fraternal organization and yet most American police officers have never heard of it. Why?

The IPA, founded in 1950, is an organization based on idealism with the goal and purpose of creating bonds of friendship and promoting co-operation. Yes, that's correct, the IPA is based on intangibles. Things we realize can't be touched or easily explained. The intangible of idealism. The intangible of friendship. How do you explain such intangibles to a potential new member when they ask "why should I join, what's in it for me". How do you explain that together we are pursuing higher goals of friendship and trust across national borders, which in the words of Arthur Troop was needed "otherwise there would be virtually no future for mankind." Or as former International IPA President Jurgen Klos once said, "Where there is friendship, there is peace". Or as Dr. Yosef Burg, former Israeli Interior minister said, "Friendship is peace".

How do you explain that the 400,000 members around the world in over 60 countries aren't paid and are all volunteers! Four hundred thousand police officers that believe in friendship and the benefits it can bring each other. Four hundred thousand police officers that are willing to assist you in whatever it is you need. How do you explain the uniqueness that is demonstrated by never creating a rank-conscious atmosphere among members who work in a quasi-military or military structure?

It's easy to explain that for just twenty-five dollar annual dues, the member will receive several magazines a year and that if they are a patch or uniform or badge or challenge coin collector, there is no better way. It's easy to explain that they are able to attend training courses at the IPA Training Facility in Germany and that the IPA provides scholarships for members and children and grandchildren of members.



But it is harder to explain the intangible benefit of meeting officers from around the world, home hosting a fellow officer from another country or staying at their home when you travel, whether organized group travel or individual travel. Who better to give you a tour of their town than a fellow officer who works there? You don't travel, that's okay you can still home host others. And you don't have to travel around the world to travel the IPA way. There are officers around the country willing to assist you. Maybe your youngster would like to have an "email pal" in another country to help them expand their awareness and help them experience other cultures and traditions first hand and who better than another cop's kid to talk to or help learn and refine foreign language skills

The IPA frees us from our jurisdictional restraints that officers know too well. As officers we become very familiar with our local officers, officers from the adjacent town or county and many from the state level who work our area. Occasionally when assigned to a task force or sent somewhere for training, we get to step out of our jurisdiction and meet officers from other areas. We usually sum it up quickly with the cop questions:

what agency you work for, how many officers, what shift you work etc. Those very few basic questions that civilians would find without any real purpose but to an officer, they tell us everything we need to know. We enjoy our brief time with our newly met fellow officers, all the time realizing that after the class, with all the best intentions and claims to meet up again, we realize it probably will not happen. Remember your academy class? You went through hell together and bonded in a way civilians can't grasp. But how many have you seen recently? How many have you seen in the last 20 years? That's what the IPA does. It lets us meet officers from around the country and world and gives us a formal organization to promote those friendships and opportunities to build on those friendships.

Steve Livingston, an IPA national officer, says "belonging to the IPA is like having good friends around the world to help in whatever you need. Maybe you need advice on an area or would like to do a ride along in another country, or just want help on your family tree or in collecting a patch. Whatever you need in another country, who better to help than a fellow officer?" Like many IPA members, Steve has hosted many officers from around the world at his home and at his agency.

Italian State Police Officer Nicola Zichella joined the IPA in 1992. He says "I joined to be culturally informed from colleagues of other police departments in Europe on how they work, what tools they use in their agencies and to inform our Italian colleagues through police journals, blogs and other methods."

Colonel Vladimir Kislukhin, a Russian police officer, said the IPA has allowed him to communicate with colleges around the world. The IPA created a Russian section in 1992. Vladimir said "before the IPA, Soviet and Russian police officers couldn't go abroad and learn how officers in other countries did the job. The KGB was always frightened that police officers of that country would enlist the police officer to work as a spy. The IPA has opened the world to us". What a powerful statement!

Calvin Chow, a US member from the San Francisco area believes the friendships he has built are the most important aspect. Chow said, "I've never had better friends than the friends I met through the IPA and they are friends from around the world."

Manfred Greitemeyer, a retired officer from Germany, said "the IPA brings police officers from around the world together as friends. I love being a member and I have friends around the world that would never have happened without the International Police Association".

The opportunities provided by membership in the International Police Association are almost incalculable. Take the first step, join, then meet friends from around the country and world. We all know in this business, things can be true and still not be completely accurate. It's the same with the IPA. It is true; the IPA is the world's oldest and largest police fraternal organization. But more accurate, the IPA is what you make of it. So if you are member, I hope you will consider becoming more active. And if you aren't a member, well you have friends you haven't met yet waiting to hear from you and the only thing in the way is you haven't yet joined.