

100 MOMENTS

RESIDENT AGENT PROGRAM

By Robert Pontious (1970-1998)

The Bureau of Criminal Investigation was adopted by State Law in 1921. As early as 1910, the Attorney General and the Governor of Iowa used a small number of investigators under the title of Special Agent. Although they were given full law enforcement authority much of their work at that time, was in the area of Public Corruption. From 1921 to 1961 special agents of the Bureau, as it was known at that time, lived in the metropolitan Des Moines area and were assigned work from Des Moines Headquarters.



1963: DIRECTOR TOMMIE THOMPSON AND BCI AGENTS

On May 5, 1961, a directive from then Director T.A. Thompson ordered all agents of the Bureau, other than those serving probationary periods, to establish residency within the City of Des

Moines or the Des Moines exchange vicinity. The Des Moines exchange vicinity is believed to mean where any phone calls from their residence to Headquarters could not be a long-distance call. All newly hired agents could continue to reside in the community where they lived prior to being hired, for their probationary year after which they were then assigned to an office.

On November 1, 1961, Director Thompson established a pilot program that tested the validity of placing agent personnel in areas outside Des Moines. The test program began with one agent, Robert Voss, establishing an office in Rockwell City. From that location, he would serve a sixteen county area of northwest Iowa. The pilot program was to last one year. During that time, the program provided information that showed the agent covered sixty percent more cases than one working from the Des Moines Headquarters Office.

Although the Bureau established an office in Rockwell City, the office was in the home of the agent. Offices being set up in homes of personnel continued for the most part until 1974 with some exceptions to be discussed later in this article. It was the duty/responsibility of this

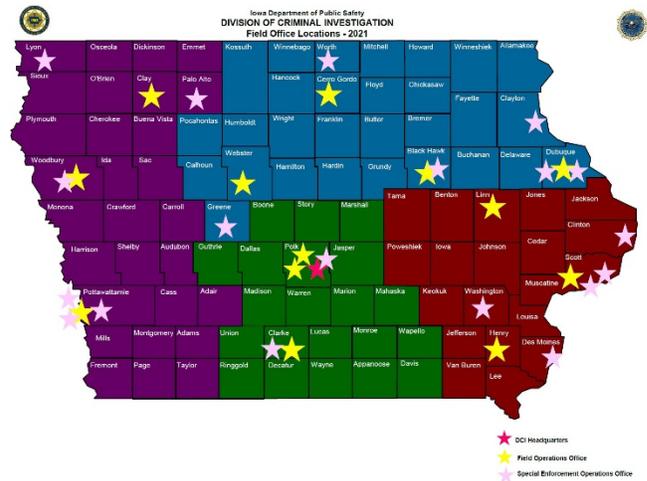
agent to assist local law enforcement, at their request in the investigation of major crimes and in matters involving the internal security of the State of Iowa.

In a follow-up report, BCI Chief Thompson stated that the pilot plan measured up to his "fullest expectation." This plan operated on about the same budget as when all personnel were assigned to Des Moines. Among the many attributes of the program was the increased cooperation and communication with local law enforcement and its ability to provide follow up to investigations. Initially, local enforcement expressed concerns, however at end of the trial local law enforcement was overwhelmingly in support of the program. Sheriff's petitioned the state to get a statewide program underway as soon as possible.

As a result, in September 1963, the Commissioner of Public Safety, William F. Suppel, created the Resident Agent program in the Bureau of Criminal Investigation. The program called for the establishment of six district offices and for the residence of each assigned agent to be located as nearly as practical to the center of the District.

Agent Tom Hopewell was assigned to the Southeast District, centered in Mt. Pleasant. Agent Dick Petit to the Northwest District in Sheldon. Other locations were established in his directive; no agents were assigned to these locations. One of those locations was Red Oak in the Southwest. It appears that J.P. (Pat) Tighe was the first agent to serve this area. Northeast Iowa was served by Richard Strassberg from the office in Oelwein. Other offices were established in Garner to serve North Central Iowa and of

course Des Moines to serve south Central, Iowa. Since there was no crime scene assistance in these early days, these personnel acted as the crime scene investigators as well. In the establishment of this program at some point, an expansion of the plan called for the eventual division of the state into eleven districts.



2021: RESIDENT AGENT MAP

In 1970, there were twelve agents assigned as resident agents, investigative responsibilities of the Bureau. Also, in this same year, the Legislature authorized eight new sworn agents to be assigned Criminal Intelligence investigations. This new group carried the title of (CCU), Criminal Conspiracy Unit. These agents officed in the old Hamilton Funeral Home, located where the New Hamilton Building is now located. All personnel of this unit were originally assigned to Des Moines. However, in 1972 two of the agents were assigned outside of Des Moines. One to western Iowa and one to Davenport.

In 1972, Craig Beek was named the Director of BCI. During the next two years, the BCI saw new growth. Resident agents outside Des Moines received office furniture and equipment

for their home offices. All agents saw the purchase of updated and needed equipment.

In 1974 Director Beek, in cooperation with the Iowa State Patrol, moved all field offices into previously established State Patrol Offices. However, prior to this time, Agent John Jutte assigned to southeast Iowa had been invited by the Patrol Lt. at Davenport to move into the State Patrol office there. Agent Ron Makin assigned to Oelwein in Northeast Iowa had been invited by the Patrol Lt. there to move his office to the District Patrol office. This led to the establishment of more offices. With the hiring of additional personnel, offices were established in Patrol Offices at Mt. Pleasant, Ottumwa, Denison, Osceola, Spencer, and Cedar Rapids. Craig Beek as an agent had officed in Clear Lake. That office was now moved to the State Patrol office in Mason City. Assistant Director Ruxlow has officed in his home at Cedar Falls. This office was relocated to the State Patrol facilities at Cedar Falls. An office was established in Council Bluffs to replace Red Oak, servicing Southwest Iowa. In 1986 the Patrol office in Atlantic was moved to Council Bluffs. A facility where all DPS divisions were located. DCI also staffed a stand-alone office in Sioux City because there was no State Patrol Office located there.

Sworn personnel spent their first year on probation. Once they successfully completed their probationary period, they were assigned to an office. They were required to live within ten miles of their office assignment. They must also maintain a phone on the same phone exchange as the office, again meaning it would not be a long-distance call from an agent's home to the office.

These actions removed all offices in agent homes. Many of the new offices saw an increase in personnel. With the creation of the Crime Laboratory in 1970, personnel from the Crime Lab took up the responsibility for crime scene examination and the preservation and examination of physical evidence. As a result, an agent was able to spend more time on field investigative work. With agents able to spend more time interviewing potential witnesses and other investigative work, more rapid closure of cases was possible. A strategy of flooding major cases with agents also led to quicker resolutions. To do this agents were brought in from many offices as the need to assist the area case agent creating quicker case turnaround time.

Prior to these changes, field agents were supervised by one Special Agent in Charge (SAC) who was assigned to Des Moines headquarters. The new initiative resulted in the Division being broken down into five zones, later being reduced to four zones. Each of these zones were supervised by a Special Agent in Charge (SAC).

The resident field agent program remains staffed in this manner in 2021.

ROBERT PONTIOUS – 2021

In his 28 year career with the Bureau/Division, Bob served as a Special Agent, SAC, and Assistant Director. He retired in 1998 and is currently enjoying his retirement in beautiful Dallas County.