CASE STUDY
Eatonville, Florida, USA

Background

The Eatonville Police Department consists of 13 full-time officers and four reserve officers. The city is located near Orlando, Florida, and is situated between Highway 17-92 and Interstate 4, along Kennedy Boulevard.

"There are a tremendous amount of stolen and expired tags, as well as suspended licenses, in the Central Florida area," said Captain Joseph Jenkins. "The statistics show over one million suspended licenses in the state of Florida, and a significant amount of those are concentrated in the Central Florida area."

Stolen tags and tag registration stickers are also a serious problem in Florida, and Florida drivers reported more than 248,000 stolen or lost registration stickers since 2008.

To address some of these abuses, the city of Eatonville recently adopted an ordinance allowing the city to impound vehicles operated by drivers with suspended licenses. A similar ordinance was adopted by the city of Sarasota, Florida, which served as a model for Eatonville.

Captain Jenkins also noted that 90 percent of the traffic on Kennedy Boulevard, Eatonville's main thoroughfare, is through traffic, with drivers traveling from Highway 17-92 to Orange Blossom Trail or Edgewater Drive. "The significant amount of traffic on Kennedy Boulevard gives our city a lot of exposure to violators," Captain Jenkins said.

That exposure places law-abiding citizens at risk. "If you get into an accident with a person without a valid license or insurance, you and your insurance company have to bear the costs," said Captain Jenkins.

Customer Profile

The historic town of Eatonville, founded in 1887, was the first municipality in the United States to be incorporated by African-Americans. The town is home to some 2,000 residents, and contains 48 historic buildings related to both the town's founding and its most famous former resident, the author Zora Neale Hurston. Each year the town hosts a festival in honor of Hurston, drawing visitors from across the United States and around the world.

Solution

Eatonville purchased a Rapid Deployment System (RDS), a mobile automatic license plate recognition (ALPR) solution, from NDI Recognition Systems (NDI-RS) The Eatonville Police Department implemented the system at the beginning of March, 2013. The ALPR system is mounted on a marked police vehicle. The unit is used primarily on the day shift with a second rotation at night.

"We chose NDI Recognition Systems because the company was highly recommended by the Sarasota Police Department," Captain Jenkins said. Eatonville is able to take advantage of other NDI-RS customers in Central Florida, and share data and back-office processing with other local law enforcement agencies to reduce operational costs.

Results

In the short time since they implemented the automatic license plate recognition system, the Eatonville Police Department has achieved very impressive results. "The results from the license plate reader have been spectacular," Captain Jenkins said. "We've had the system just over 30 days, and have conducted more than 200 traffic stops so far."

"The license plate recognition system takes the guesswork out of the traffic stop," Captain Jenkins explained. "Before we installed the system, we usually only discovered suspended licenses and stolen plates when we stopped a vehicle for another offense, like speeding or running a stop sign. When the officer ran the tag, it would come back as invalid."

Stolen registration stickers make it difficult for officers to visually identify invalid tags. A plate with a stolen sticker showing the current year looks legitimate. Now, though, the Eatonville PD's ALPR system scans tags automatically, checking them against national, state, and local "hotlists." If the license plate is invalid, stolen, or belongs to a driver with a suspended license, the officer in the vehicle is alerted and can pull the vehicle over. "The LPR system basically runs everything that passes by the vehicle," Captain Jenkins said. "Officers are able to identify violations that they normally would not see."

"The LPR system has proven itself to be an invaluable tool," said Captain Jenkins. "It's just remarkable, the results that you get in a very short time. We are able to protect our citizens that have valid driver's licenses, current registration, and proper insurance. And we are apprehending a lot of people with stolen tags and decals."

That's quite a shock for many of the violators, Captain Jenkins noted. "The first thing they ask is 'Why did you stop me?' And when we tell them their licenses are suspended, they want to know how we knew. With this tool, we can tell."

Notable Successes

» In just over 30 days of operation, Eatonville PD's automatic license plate recognition system has allowed officers to conduct over 200 traffic stops.

» Using the ALPR system, the Eatonville chief of police identified a vehicle with a stolen registration decal. The driver fled at a high rate of speed, crashed the vehicle, and continued to flee on foot. The driver was not apprehended at that time, but a handgun was recovered from the vehicle.