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The Temple of Boom

The university needs its private cops to help protect its mission: Growth.

By Aaron Kase

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Susquehanna Avenue doesn't seem so menacing in the daytime. Running east to west through North Philadelphia just north of Temple University, the street feels calm at 11 a.m. The blocks are lined with Halal meat shops, ice-cold-beer joints, some run-down rowhouses and vacant lots filled with tires and mattresses. The sidewalks are nearly empty, and few cars drive by.

But make no mistake, tranquility isn't the norm in this neighborhood. Bad shit goes down too. The Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) Crime Map shows a homicide, a rape, seven robberies, 12 aggravated assaults, 19

burglaries and three stolen vehicles for the month of June within a three-block radius of 17th and Susquehanna.

Even so, the area is getting safer, thanks to the widening reach of Temple and its private police force. As enrollment at the university increases and more students move into the neighborhoods around campus, Temple feels the impetus to use its considerable resources to protect them.

The increased security is good for business. Temple enrollment is up 20 percent in the last decade. And increased safety for students means better neighborhood security in general, paving the way for new businesses to come in and prosper.

“We feel very good about what Temple’s been able to do in that we feel that our students are safe,” says Anthony Wagner, Temple’s executive vice president, chief financial officer and treasurer. “The single biggest indicator of our success is that incredibly strong student demand we’ve seen over the last decade.”

University safety departments are part of a national trend of security privatization that has been growing for the last 40 years. Private security forces, ranging from unarmed guards to full-fledged police squads, have been created to fill voids left by municipal police.

Here in Philadelphia, budget concerns have put the PPD under the knife of Mayor Nutter, who has proposed eliminating two incoming police classes to vacate 230 positions. The move would reduce the force from about 6,600 officers to nearly 6,400, making the private police forces more important than ever. With a security budget of \$18 million, Temple is striving to create a safer environment, deploying a 121-officer police force, plus 73 in-house security guards and 225 others contracted from AlliedBarton.

“Part of my street isn’t that bad, the other part is really bad,” says Leon Bruce, an accounting major at Temple, who lives half a block away on North Colorado. Despite pervasive crime, Bruce says he generally feels safe.

Authorities keep their eyes on the block. Bruce, who lives on the fringe of Temple’s area of influence, says, “there’s always a Temple cop in the neighborhood.”



As its influence continues to expand outward into the neighborhoods, Temple is treading down a path the University of Pennsylvania has already blazed. In the last decade, University City has undergone a complete makeover, unrecognizable in commercial complexion and neighborhood safety. The changes were brought about largely through security supplied directly or indirectly by Penn (116 private cops) and, to a lesser extent, Drexel, which just unveiled its own police force last year. Combined with the PPD, that makes three police forces and four major security-guard forces in University City including teams of AlliedBarton guards employed by the University of the Sciences and the University City District (UCD) development corporation. The eyes, ears, night sticks and guns on the street have made an impact. “I have personally witnessed tremendous changes in the neighborhood for the positive,” says Lori Klein Brennan, who has lived in University City for seven years. “It’s cleaner, safer, more amenities, restaurants, attractions, more young families have moved into the neighborhood.”

Brennan is the director of marketing and communications for the UCD, a business improvement organization founded in 1997 to increase security and market the neighborhood to businesses.

The UCD spends \$1.2 million for the security officers annually, employing 42 AlliedBarton security guards as “ambassadors,” who patrol as far west as 50th Street seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 3 a.m., on foot or bicycle wearing green and yellow vests.

“Seven years ago people were not willing to go west of 43rd Street,” says Brennan.

“I think public safety has a tremendous amount to do with it,” she says of the neighborhood revitalization and UCD’s efforts to create a visible security force. “Safety is the foundation of what neighborhoods are built on.”

West and North Philly each contain some of the most dangerous areas in the city, but with the resources to deploy their own security, the large universities are making inroads into crime-fighting where city police haven’t made an impact. They’re transforming entire neighborhoods in the process. Like University City, the Jefferson Manor and Yorktown neighborhoods east of Temple feel the effects of extra security, here in the form of Temple police.

“This is one neighborhood where people still have their lawn chairs and sit outside,” says Roberta Faison, who has lived in Jefferson Manor since the 1960s.

An estimated 6,000 students live in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding Temple’s campus. Temple police can patrol up to 500 yards off campus, says Carl Bittenbender, executive director of campus safety services, though they usually stay a bit closer to home. “Generally, our patrol area is a block to two off campus,” he says. The patrols don’t and can’t cover everywhere students live in the neighborhoods, though “as Temple expands that area keeps getting bigger and bigger,” Bittenbender adds.

James Baraldi, who graduated last year and who lived on Bouvier Street, a few blocks west of Broad between 17th and 18th, says he didn’t see much of the Temple police on his block. “There were people on the corner selling drugs in the open. There was an open space next to our house, which was basically the neighborhood trash can and toilet.”

In 2008, the last year data is available, 1,064 Part I and Part II crimes (which range from disorderly conduct to murder) were reported on and around campus. “If you were a victim of a crime on campus, that counts; Not just students,” Bittenbender says. A glance down the school’s daily crime log shows a mixture of underage alcohol consumption and public intoxication mixed with assaults, thefts, stolen cars and burglary.

Temple recently celebrated the 30th anniversary of its police force, which holds Act 120 certification from the Municipal Police Officers Education and Training Commission, giving the force the same powers of arrest and investigation as the PPD. “A police officer is a police officer whether employed by the city of Philadelphia, Penn or Temple,” says PPD spokesman Lt. Frank Vanore. “They all get the same training at the same police academies.”

“We have a memorandum of understanding between the universities and police department,” says Vanore. “Certain investigations they handle, certain investigations we handle.”

It sounds like a win-win situation, but problems arise when the extra security comes packaged with institutional expansion, raising housing prices and driving out lower income residents. Long considered a public service, security can become a monetized resource, available only for those who can afford to pay the bills.

“If you’re not a yuppie making \$100,000 a year, you can’t afford to live around here anymore,” says Dena Lewis-Sallie who had to give up her one-bedroom apartment on the 700 block of Franklin Street, because the landlord raised her rent from \$600 a month (including electricity) to \$800 (plus electricity.) Lewis-Salles says that the more the neighborhood gentrifies, the “further north” longtime residents are forced to move. “Now where I’m at there’s drug activity. Further north you get the worse it gets.”

In 2000, the average price of a house between the blocks surrounding Temple was \$32,891. In 2008, prices reached \$87,932, and continue to rise despite the housing crash, averaging \$97,224 last year, according to Econsult.

It's not just the cost of living that's under attack. It's also the quality of life. Temple cops are routinely called to stop students from causing disturbances in their adopted neighborhoods.

"Students have had parties that have gotten out of the way. We called Temple police to quiet them down," says Willie J. DeShields, president of the Yorktown Community Organization.

Faison says the neighborhood started having late-night rowdiness problems when investors came and bought single-family houses, renting them out to five or six college students. "A lot of the people that were moving in here were Temple students," she says.

"We've got the standard town-and-gown activity. Our neighbors go to bed around 10 and that's around the time the students start partying. Neighbors call us up and say kids are being noisy," says Anthony Wagner, Temple's executive vice president, chief financial officer and treasurer.

In reaction to the student influx Jefferson Manor and Yorktown were granted a special zoning ordinance by the Department of Licenses and Inspections that bars rentals by absentee landlords. Effectively, apartments can no longer be rented to Temple students unless the owner is willing to live in the house with them. This May, the residents won a lawsuit forcing certain owners who had continued renting to students to discontinue the practice.

"You will see Temple police going through the neighborhood," says DeShields. "At some point they had officers that were walking through the community and on bikes as well."

With full-time enrollment at an all-time high of more than 30,000, Temple's reach and power has never been greater and its ultimate effects on surrounding neighborhoods remain to be seen. The school is still growing up, and that's up, not out, administrators point out, wary of perceptions that Temple is trying to engulf its surrounding neighborhoods.

"I once heard somebody say it this way: No one can bring Philadelphia back on their own, but no one can bring it back without Temple," Wagner says.

As Temple moves forward with its renaissance, searching for balance between revitalizing and overwhelming the surrounding neighborhoods, the fact remains that it would not be in a position to effect major changes without its police force. Similarly, Penn could never have transformed University City to the extent it did without its own police and security initiatives. With some caveats about rising prices, many neighbors appreciate the increased safety—few people would say they aspire to live in a crime-ridden neighborhood—but the sobering thought is that the city relies on university cops to shoulder such a large burden. There are countless other neighborhoods throughout the city that could use more policing, be it by the city or a private force, but there are only so many Temples, Penns and Drexels to go around.

"There's been a huge growth in private policing over the past several decades," says Jennifer Wood, an associate professor of criminal justice at Temple. But Wood outlines "concerns with the rise of private policing with the sense that those that can afford to pay for private police will get a supplemental security blanket around them. If you live in a gated community, you buy yourself into a lifestyle that's highly secure.

"Some worry that the process of marketizing security will exacerbate the gaps between the wealthiest segments of the population and the less well-to-do," Wood says. "Should security be a commodity that you can buy?"

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