

Ohio State

A L U M N I M A G A Z I N E

The High Street Shuffle

Change is the one constant along Ohio State's main drag

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WILLIE YOUNG: OFF-CAMPUS WATCHDOG 24 **THE VOICE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA 30** **THE JOY OF GROUNDHOGS 54**



Willie Young takes the "three P's" to heart: "Where you have people, you're going to have problems, but you also have potential."

JODI MILLER

Weekend warrior

On Friday and Saturday nights, Willie Young likes to hit off-campus parties. He's not there for the beer.

By **MELISSA CURRENCE**

Willie Young knows Ohio State's party scene better than any fifth-year senior. He knows where the hottest parties are and where to buy the cheapest 12-pack. He can tell you about the intricacies of beer pong and other drinking games, and why there's a difference between a Friday-night party and one on Saturday.

As director of Off-Campus Student Services, Young drives his white van an average of 30 miles every Friday and Saturday night in and around the University District, the nation's largest urban student neighborhood. He keeps an eye out for possible problems—popped streetlights, people walking alone, parties

on the verge of getting out of control—and acts as a conduit between students, police officers, and university officials.

Young's photographic memory gives him an advantage when it comes to interacting with students. He can recall names, faces, majors, hometowns. "When I meet students, I can tell them what's on their front porch, what color their shutters are, and what type of beer they drink," he said. He charms them with his quick retrieval of facts, such as their high school mascots and football trivia. "I feel very much at home with the students," he said.

Young has spent his entire career on college campuses. He earned his undergraduate degree and a master's degree in student personnel administration from Bowling Green State University, then

went on to work at schools in Ohio—including Defiance College and Wilberforce and Wittenberg universities—and elsewhere. He came to Ohio State in 1990 as an area coordinator in the residence life office and was appointed director of Off-Campus Student Services eight years later.

When Young took over as director, he decided to see firsthand what was happening in the University District on weekends. He began criss-crossing the area in his own car, talking to students living off campus as well as permanent residents. “I needed to know the community I was responsible for,” he said.

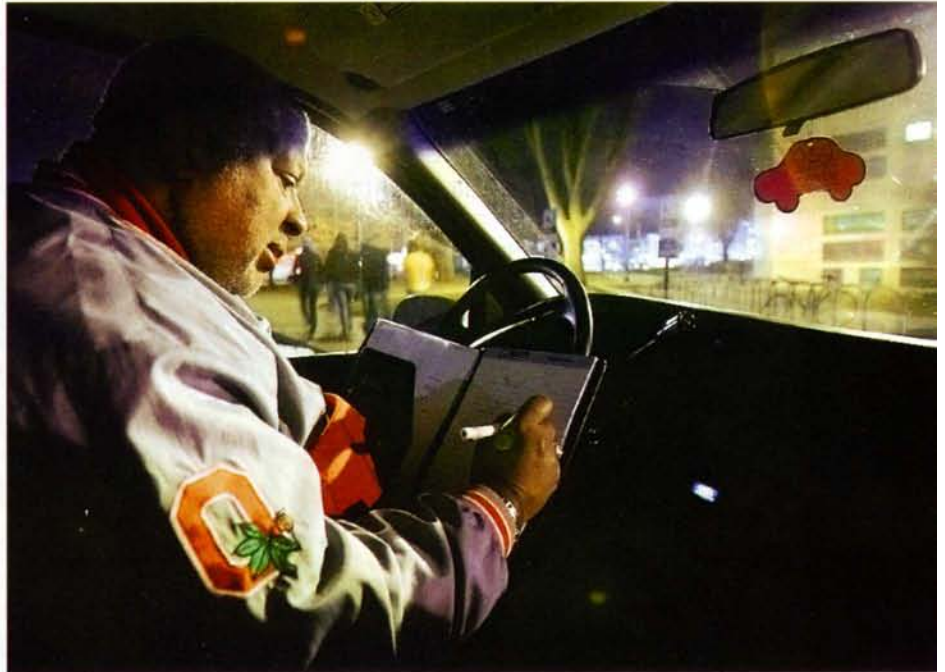
Busting students isn’t his mission; Young simply wants to provide them with the knowledge they need to stay safe. He typically starts his night by introducing himself to students who are setting up for parties, offering advice on how to reduce problems such as overcrowding and underage drinking. Then he settles in at High Street and 12th Avenue to count what he calls the “migration,” the hordes of students, mostly freshmen, who leave the dorms and head east in search of fun. Some carry mugs to fill up at the many kegs waiting for them off campus.

Based on the migration, Young can let police and other officials know what type of night to expect. “Three hundred is about normal for a weekend night,” he said. “It’s when it gets to about a thousand that you know there might be problems.”

Despite being in the thick of rowdy crowds, students are usually receptive to Young’s advice. “They understand I’m looking out for their safety,” he said. “We don’t try to stop them from being social or enjoying their college experience.” However, he supports the decision made in 2001 to extend the student code of conduct to off-campus activities. It can be hard for students in Ohio State’s massive undergraduate population to make a name for themselves, he said, and parties are often the easiest way to gain notoriety.

Because Young is out and about almost every weekend, his ability to spot trends is a valuable resource for police and university officials. He knows that parties on Fridays tend to have bottled or canned beer, for example, and Saturdays are for kegs. He has been advocating for the abolishment of bottles in the University District—they can too easily become weapons—but he also is aware of the flip side, that students drinking from kegs often lose track of how much they have had.

Young also stays on top of social networking sites that affect the party scene. An invitation can spread instantly on the Internet.




“If I go out on my Facebook account, I ask students what invitations they have received,” he said. That helps him gauge the potential magnitude of problems.

Young knows of no other college administrator in the country who monitors the off-campus scene like he does. He commutes every day from Springfield, about an hour west of Columbus, and admits that being away from his family so much on the weekends is difficult. But his concern for the safety of Ohio State’s students fuels his commitment to the job. “If it has helped keep problems down, it was time well spent,” he said.

Besides making sure students stay on the mostly straight and narrow, Young has worked to personalize the services his office provides. Off-Campus Student Services offers everything from roommate and landlord referrals to litter-control programs to information about ride-sharing and local child care. Young often drives apartment-hunting students and their families around in the same white van in which he roams the University District late at night.

“Too many times, a school will think of off-campus students as ‘out of sight, out of mind.’ But they are our students, and we can’t forget them,” he said. ■

 Hear audio clips of Willie Young at www.ohiostatealumni.org/newscenter/young.php

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