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Speaker 1: Welcome to CRR Radio from the Vision 2020 Project.

Ed Comeau: This is CRR Radio and I'm Ed Comeau. Today, we're going to be talking about a Town/Gown project that was done down in Richmond, Kentucky. But before we get into the conversation with Cory Lewis, I just want to give you a little bit of a background as to how this all came to be. Back in 2010 I was doing a federal grant project with the Michael H. Minger Foundation. That's where the original idea was born. We wanted to get students going out with fire departments to do home safety visits and smoke alarm installs. And we did a number of successful projects there. We did them in high risk communities down in a West Virginia, Kentucky, and Mississippi, on several Indian reservations.

It was a great project that went really well. Fast forward to 2017 and First Alert, who makes smoke alarms, contacted me and said, "You know, we'd like to donate some smoke alarms. You have any idea for projects?" I said, "Well, we did this project pretty successfully a number of years ago. And how about we try that again?" They loved the idea and we redid it. We did it again in 2018, last year, and one of the things that we learned from 2017 is originally we were going to do it during September, which is national campus fire safety month. Well, that was difficult for a lot of people to try to get it done in that month because of the start of school, so we expanded it to a whole semester in 2018 and we have 25 AHJs across the country that took part, but also pitched the idea of doing it on Martin Luther King Day as a community day of service. So with that I'd like to get into today's podcast where we're going to be talking about that with Corey Lewis. And Corey, could you take a minute and introduce yourself?

Corey Lewis: Sure. I am the fire prevention education specialist as well as the public information officer for the Richmond Fire Department. We are a moderately sized city with a population of about 45 thousand, with the influx of about 15 thousand students during school time at Eastern Kentucky University. We cover about 27 square miles with four fire stations and have roughly 65 line firefighters.

Ed Comeau: And I mentioned that project that we did in 2010 with the Michael H Minger Foundation, and Corey was an integral part of that. He helped put that all together, worked with me on reaching out to the students and learning more from them. So Corey had a good hit on this whole project. And as I mentioned in 2018, we had 25 AHJs that took part of the project of which Richmond was one. But Corey, you really took it to the next level for Martin Luther King Day. You want to tell us a little bit about what you did that day?

Corey Lewis: Well, yeah. We were very fortunate to be a part of the Michael H. Minger campus fire safety launch a number of years ago and kind of built a great



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partnership with you, Ed, but along with that to Gail and the Michael H. Minger Foundation. And at the time that was kind of a new concept for us. The partnering with the East Eastern Kentucky University students and taking students into the field. We'd actually been doing smoke alarm installations as part of the fire department for a number of years. I think we started a smoke alarm campaign back in 2004. We had some excess AFG grant money from an equipment grant and we rolled that into the purchase of smoke alarms and some purchasing of some fire prevention material. And we really started that concept of a community installation event as part of that funds. And so we were very accustomed to doing installations as a fire department, community canvassing set up by appointments.

But when we first latched onto the opportunity to actually engage students as part of that process, that was kind of foreign to us. And so the Michael H Minger Foundation and Campus Fire Watch introduced us to that partnership. And as part of that community, or Campus Fire Safety Month, the September launch, we brought students in, educated those students, and then went out in the community with those students and facilitated installations alongside of the students and the firefighters. And so to fast forward to Martin Luther King Day this year, we wanted to kind of capitalize on that movement of Martin Luther King Day is a day for service, not necessarily a day off. And so we put the plea out to some student organizations that we wanted to focus our efforts on engaging student organizations, pairing them with firefighters and going out into the community to do smoke alarm installation.

Ed Comeau: And how did it all go?

Corey Lewis: I would think ... It's near and dear to my heart, but I think we executed it well. We ended up with 53 eastern Kentucky University students from four different student organizations that came to participate. And we were able to install 70 smoke alarms, 10 carbon monoxide alarms through the program. Interestingly enough, every home we went into had smoke alarms. Not every home had working smoke alarms. Not every home had all their smoke alarms working. Even expired alarms were still functional in some homes. And in other homes we saw alarms that didn't have batteries, compliance issues of alarms that had been taken down because they had become nuisance alarms and we ended up removing 34 expired alarms.

And then to kind of to capitalize on this, when you're met at your door, I guess with a group of students, say four or five students and a firefighter, sometimes that can be a little intimidating for our demographic of citizens and community members. So one of the things that we ended up with was about 25 referrals for future installations. So we've spent the next week or so here in Richmond actually going back with a smaller entourage, with a one engine company, or



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even myself, installing alarms. So to follow up to that we installed 70 smoke alarms that day, but to date, because of the publicity of the program as well as the engagement of leaving door hangers in areas that we might've missed individuals because they were at work or whatnot, we have gone back and we've installed an additional 25 alarms. So we're pushing 95 alarms.

Ed Comeau: Oh that's excellent. And how did you identify the homes to go to in the first place?

Corey Lewis: We have been working with some students at Eastern Kentucky University with a program called Fire Cares. That is a program through the International Association of Firefighters. It has our information, our run statistics, our run volume. And that has generated a heat map. So we took that information along with some of our census track information and some of our new statistics from 2018 and we looked for high target areas and kind of narrowed the field down. So how we prioritize those risks where we were looking for older homes, so the average age of the home, which we were able to get by looking at PVA statistics and PVA data.

So we had the average age of the home, and then we use the census track data to get the average age of home ownership in that area. And then we also used data that we had gotten ourselves by doing installations. So we looked for areas that we had not canvassed in previous areas and/or we looked for areas that we had done in that 2004, 2005 timeframe that we knew those alarms were potentially going to be expired if they hadn't already been replaced. So we used that data to target our areas and give us the high risk areas that we wanted to be in.

Ed Comeau: And compared to when you've done previous smoke alarm installs, did you see a difference? I mean because you used all this data, did you install more smoke alarms because you encountered more homes with need?

Corey Lewis: Yes. So if you look at the program that we did in 2017, and you and you look at the number of alarms that we installed, we were in a target area that we merely identified by the average age of the home. We didn't use any other data. We went to an older community, an older part of the housing area that had specifics to the age of the home. So only used that to compile that data. And we did not install that many alarms. I think if I looked back, we were in the neighborhood of a two hour event. We'd only installed about 20, 25 alarms. That was still successful. We had a significantly less number of volunteers that year. We had around 20 volunteers, whereas this year we had 53. I think that also helped us. We were able to canvas a larger area. So we had so many volunteers that we got into some target areas that we wouldn't have normally gotten into a smaller number of volunteers.



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So we had a high risk and then I actually laid the maps out into our maps one through three were the ones with the highest risk and then four, five and six had a decreasing number level of risk, incrementally through six. And I wanted to give us enough area, but I hadn't really thought that we would get to map five and six in those specific areas. So by fault was week five and six would be in the next campaign we did potentially in the Fall, when in theory ... In reality, excuse me, we actually did. We got maps, high traffic areas in maps one and two, so we did more than one team in those areas. We had teams canvassing both sides of the streets, so we were actually able to complete those maps completely and not leave any homes untouched. And then in maps three and four, we got probably 80% of those maps done. And then that allowed us to actually send some other teams into five and six.

Now, we didn't complete maps five and six and those target areas. But we got started and we started ... I think when you're visible in a community, a neighborhood, people see the firetrucks. People see a number of ... A flurry of activity. They're questioning what it is. So I have found over the last week or so, we've actually generated a lot of installs in those neighborhoods because they just saw what was going on and they had questions. So we might not have actually got to their home with a door hanger, or missed them, or even knocked on their door, but they may be asking their neighbor, "Hey, I saw the fire department was down at your house the other day. What was going on?" "Oh, they were installing smoke alarms." And so that starts some questioning and then we get those phone calls here at the fire station and we schedule those installations for a later date.

Ed Comeau: Now, you mentioned you used a lot of different data sources to compile these heat maps. How difficult was that to do? I mean were these readily available sources? Did it take a rocket scientist to do it, to pull all this stuff together? How complicated was that whole process?

Corey Lewis: It didn't really ... It didn't take a rocket scientist, but I will say that it was not easy. Without some of that data ... So if your fire department may not have your census track data, if your fire department may not have good annual run statistical data or analysis that tells you this is where we've made a lot of calls, this is the average age of home fires, of the tenants or the occupants. We really had to get down in the weeds with some of our data and it wasn't difficult, but it was time consuming. The other piece was that with the PVA office. So we had to compile and look through a lot of data. Fortunately for me, I've waned a lot on some college students that were really good at maneuvering statistical data around and kind of manipulating data to get what we wanted out of it.

So I was able to get them to focus in on average age of the home from the PVA data. And then we use that spreadsheet to overlay addresses over the heat map



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that we got from Fire Cares to ensure that that same ... We wanted kind of some redundancy, but some kind of validation that what we were finding was correct and that our run statistics say for the last 10 years was also a leading us to the same conclusions. So we used the PVA and the average age of the home to overlay on the heat map, which gives us some of the same information, but we use that to concur our data and to kind of affirm for us that that was the right area to be in

Ed Comeau: Now, you had a large team of students. I think you said 53 involved. How'd you go about finding them?

Corey Lewis: Well, we had typically been using student organizations that were involved in the fire program. Those seem to be the most passionate students about actually going out and installing smoke alarms. And we wanted to expand that reach of this year. So we reached out to the Greek organizations on campus and just spent some time on the phone. I spent some time engaging in emails back and forth to a service Sorority, the KDTs, Kappa Delta Tau, and the Theta Chi, which I am an alumnus of. So I kind of had a little inside track there. And we reached out to them and they were really embraced being a part of this and in part of community service. I think it's ingrained in a lot of Greek organizations that they need to get out and be a part of the community and kind of immerse themselves in some type of community service or philanthropy. And rather than just raising money for something or fundraising for a particular project or goal, I think this gave students an outlet to actually become part of the solution.

And so when we developed the program and developed how we were actually going to interact with the community members, an integral part of that is having the students be that face of the fire department, even though they're with a firefighter. I always said it's funny to watch the beginnings of the program. So when you first turn these groups loose in a neighborhood or a specific area, the firefighter who's with them, kind of that liaison, he's starting to do the initial contact with the community member, the homeowner. He introduces himself, introduces what we're doing. About midway through, you start to see the college students taking that step and they're actually engaging the community member. By the end of it, the firefighter's just sort of there as a resource. The college students are engaging the homeowner from the time they knock on the door or ring the doorbell throughout the installation process. They're making decisions because they're more comfortable in what they're doing.

At first, they're not really sure. Even though we spent ... We had a component of our program is about an hour class time. So we bring them in, we talk about risk assessments. We talk about assessing the risk in a home and trying to not necessarily share every tidbit of community risk reduction, educational components with the homeowner, but assessing that risk of that particular



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homeowner, whether it be cooking fire safety, smoking safety or means of escape safety, kind of assessing the risk in the home to determine what would be the greatest risk to that homeowner. And they become really engaged in sharing that after a few visits. And so the more they do, the more comfortable they are sharing information, the more comfortable they are in actually doing the installation in the right and correct locations. So to me that's a testament to the program. That's a testament to actually engaging students in the community and getting them to make decisions.

Now fast forward, the hope is that by getting them engaged and doing that, then getting them engaged in making those decisions and interacting with the homeowner and sharing this information that they've learned earlier in the day, that they themselves then have ownership of that when they move into an apartment or when they build their own home or they buy that first home, they are themselves hopefully going to apply some of the things they have learned to keep them safe. So we teach kind of that personal ownership component of the safety. So we hope they retain that as they go on.

Ed Comeau: And that's an excellent point. The tagline of this whole thing is learning fire safety by doing fire safety. And when you typically have your fire science students there, they already know this stuff. So it sounds like these were students that really didn't come in with any established knowledge on fire safety. Would that be fair to say?

Corey Lewis: Yeah. Two student groups specifically didn't have any knowledge of smoke alarm installations, fire safety messaging, leading cause of home fires, any of that. So that was new to them and giving them that information to go out and share, where the college students that are here learning fire safety ... Or not necessarily fire safety, that are within our fire administration, fire explosion investigation coursework. They have to go through a fire prevention coursework. They know code compliance, they know national fire statistics. So it's not really new to that student group, but you're exactly right. The Kappa Delta Taus and the Theta Chis predominantly most of those students were not in or here for that career field within the fire service. They're here doing other things. And so that was very new to them.

Ed Comeau: And what was kind of the reaction to the students when the day was done? Did you get anything back from them?

Corey Lewis: Yeah, I think from start to finish, it morphs into a very rewarding experience. From the start, I think there's a little hesitation about canvassing neighborhoods and engaging a community member in a subject that you might not be proficient in. But as they became more accustomed to it and accustomed to that sharing what they had learned, that kind of regurgitation of information and



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being confident in getting smoke alarms put in the right places, it's a very rewarding experience. So they come back and you hear, "We met this nice lady that she didn't have any smoke alarms." I think they're really astonished from my perspective at some of the homes that had smoke alarms that didn't work, and they're like, "Man, I never would have ... I didn't think about people actually not having these operational safety devices in their home." And how vitally important they are as a first line of defense for every homeowner in keeping them safe.

So to see that and hear those stories when they come back after actually doing those installations or throughout the day of doing installations, I think there's a breakthrough that happens. I think when we organize the group and we start engaging those organizations to help us from the identification of where we needed to be, to our high risk residents, all of that, sharing that information with them and getting them out there as affective boots on the ground, that makes an impact and it makes an impact on the community member, on the homeowner, but it also makes an impact on the student to see an engaged community member. You might see community members with disabilities, you might see community members that multi-generational families all living in the same home in certain impoverished areas in certain neighborhoods. So that experience for them and getting them engaged with the community specifically here in Richmond, I think that's a rewarding piece for them.

Ed Comeau: What kind of lessons learned did you get out of it? If you're going to do this again, or somebody called you up and said, "Cory, what'd you learn out of this?"

Corey Lewis: A couple of quick observations that we made that day is 53 volunteers is a lot of volunteers. So when you're drumming up support, and full disclosure, we didn't think we'd have that many. The high that day was about 14 or 15 degrees. I really thought the weather would hamper our ability to get that many students out. I started to panic when about 25 showed up. When 35 showed up, I was really worried and when we started to getting the other two big student groups that came in and I was counting numbers and I knew we were going to be above 50, I started scrambling to ensure that we had enough drills, enough smoke alarms, enough ladders to get everybody out and make everybody productive in the installation process.

So one, I think your number of volunteers and anticipation, sometimes when the groups are too big, your residents and your homeowners are a little intimidated by that. So keeping those numbers that actually go to the door down is going to help us. I think we tried to instill that, but I did see a group of four or five students going to the door and ringing the doorbell. So we try to keep that number down. We're going to really work next time to maybe have a reconnaissance team of students knocking on the door, just one or two, and



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then with the firefighter introducing what we're doing and who we are and I think we might be received a little better.

Second to that, prior notification to certain areas that we go in so that they know that it's coming. We found that if not every group had a fire truck with them in the neighborhood. And so the perception of you saying you're with the fire department, but the big red truck's not right out in front of your house. That mentality for residents in making them feel okay and comfortable letting us into the home, having the big red truck rolling up and down the street and validate that we are with the fire department and having our members ... It was cold that day so our members were layered up. We might not have looked very authoritative or looked very fire department, even though we had yellow jackets on that identified us as fire department.

We're going to try to go ahead next time and get into these neighborhoods potentially with the neighborhood associations or even canvassing door to door with door hangers. "Hey, we're going to be in your neighborhood next week on this date doing installations. Let us know if you specifically want one or be prepared if you're not home to call us back in the future." So I think that will help us. I don't want to give it the implication that we weren't successful because I think we were hugely successful. And I think we continued, the program continues to be successful as we still are seeing the tangible installations after the fact. We're still going and getting phone calls every day from neighborhood members and other neighbors that say, "Hey, I know you were at my neighbor's other day installing smoke alarms. I wasn't home. Could you ... I need smoke alarms or I think I need smoke alarms. Could you come back out?" So we're still fielding those phone calls and that is making us successful, even after the program ended on Martin Luther King Day.

Ed Comeau: Well, kudos to you, Cory. I mean you did an excellent job down there taking the whole Town/Gown Community Fire Safety Project even a step further on Martin Luther King Day. And I also want to give a shout out to First Alert for donating all the smoke alarms to make this happen and that this is a partnership between Michael Minger Foundation, Campus Fire Watch and First Alert to make this whole project, now in its second year, even more successful. So, Corey, thanks. I really appreciate you taking the time to tell us about it and share your experiences and we're certainly going to have a lot more on the webpage, some links and some photos as to what happened down there in Richmond. So thanks a lot, Corey.

Corey Lewis: You're very welcome. And absolutely, thanks a lot to First Alert, to the Michael H. Minger Foundation for continuing to invest in fire departments and community risk reduction efforts. What a unique opportunity, I think, to engage college students and engage the community in a day of service without



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expending a lot of fire department and taxpayer resources through this grant and this town and gown partnership. I really think it pays dividends when you have these college students engaging with your local fire departments to go out into the community in service. We're going to be reaping the rewards for a long time to come and it's a great opportunity. I think our student base now expects to do this in the coming years. I heard every point of contact for those student organizations say, "Hey, we want to be involved with this when you do it again." And I look forward to hosting that and doing it again and having that level of participation.

Ed Comeau: Well, we've been talking with Corey Lewis from the Richmond, Kentucky Fire Department about the Martin Luther King community day of service that they did down there. And my name is Ed Comeau from CRR radio.

Speaker 1: Thanks for joining us on CRR radio from the Vision 2020 Project. For more information on community risk reduction, please visit us at [www.StrategicFire.org](http://www.StrategicFire.org).