

## **Officer Adovasio Interview**

The responsibility to patrol YSU's campus is not limited to the physical grounds alone but also the realm of cyber space. YSU Police Lieutenant Mark Adovasio says that campus computer terminals can be accessed with little or no difficulty by anyone with the will and the skill to do so. "There was a subject who walked into one of our computer labs, got online and used one of our (computers) to harass a woman in another state," Adovasio said. "The FBI got involved in it along with the Mahoning Valley Law Enforcement Task Force (MVLETF) and our department...we were looking for him because we thought he might be on campus," he said.

Lt. Adovasio says the perpetrator was apprehended at a west side (Youngstown) location and was not a student, stating that the subject was "just a civilian who knew he could walk onto campus and use a computer and he did," he said. Another computer related crime cited by Adovasio was worked on in concert with the Ohio State Highway Patrol and involved a similar case in which the suspect, also not a student, "threatened the Louisiana State Governor through email (using) one of our computer labs over in Meshel Hall...he didn't want to see the New Orleans Saints football team moved out of the state of Louisiana," Adovasio said. "He was convicted and received some jail time and probation...but we got him so it ended well," he said.

### **Crimes are not limited to the main campus alone**

YSU holds classes at locations in Boardman, Austintown and Niles. "Recently I worked on one at the Continuing Education Building at Southwoods Commons, an extension of YSU out in Boardman," he said. "They had some new computers delivered out there and ...eight (were) missing...with the help of (Boardman Police Lieutenant Jack Nichols) we ended up getting four or five of them back...the rest were destroyed," he said. Theft of computers on the main campus occurs "very rarely now," he said. Lt. Adovasio attributes the decline to the fact that "some areas have cameras and the majority of the labs are monitored by lab assistants, which has really cut down on the rate," he said.

Adovasio, a Girard native and nineteen year police veteran, first became interested in police work when his oldest brothers' friend asked him if he would like to join the Girard Auxiliary Police Dept. "he asked me if I was interested in the program and I said yeah, what the heck, I'll try it. So I did and it evolved and I ended up liking it," he said. Mark joined the YSU Police force in 1982 after completing a two year Police Science Degree at Youngstown State and Basic Training from the Police Academy.

In 1993 he was selected by YSU PD Chief Jack Gocala to join the newly developed Violent Crimes Fugitive Squad (VCFS), a result of the Safe Streets Act passed in 1992 by the Federal Government as a way to combat the growing crime rate throughout the United States. "Money was allocated to develop task forces in 1993," he said. "My Chief is a graduate of the FBI Academy...he asked me if I would be interested in joining the task force...each department in Mahoning County was to provide a member...I said I would be more than glad to do it," he said. At its inception the VCFS was formed to "go out and find felons that have warrants on them," he said. Now known as the *Mahoning Valley Law Enforcement Task Force* the unit is, "under the umbrella of the FBI," he said, and combines the manpower and resources of local law enforcement agencies with those of the Federal Government. "we work with the FBI, (U.S.) Marshals, various Mahoning County police organizations," he said. As a member of the task force, Adovasio's work is not limited to campus policing. "Last week when I was out at the task force we were looking for a fugitive that was out of Akron and we got him on the East Side of Youngstown," he said.

### **Hair Raising Experience**

Although there have been many close calls, in the line of duty Lt. Adovasio has never had to shoot anyone with his gun "I've drawn it but never had to fire it," he said. One event which stands out in his mind took place on a Sunday afternoon in 1986 when he was training a new recruit in what to do in the advent of being confronted by a subject with a gun. "As I was training her we got this call that there was a shooting at the east bound service road and Fifth Avenue.

While it didn't actually occur on campus we responded and once there at the scene there was a woman who I presumed to be dead because she was shot over six times," he said. "A cabby saw it happen and was chasing him (suspect) along with a member of our dept. and the YPD...down to what we call the *Smokey hollow* area," he said. "Myself and the new recruit ended up in front of him and facing off with this guy in one of the isolated parking lots as he came out of the woods. He kept raising his gun at us and had to take him down, with no shots fired, but through tactics. We had the cover of our car and gave him commands and he complied. Then we approached him with the tactics we had just been going over and luckily it worked out so we didn't have to shoot him," he said.

Upon apprehending the suspect Lt. Adovasio recalls the reason the man gave for shooting the woman, "he killed her because there was some plot between them that they would burn some house down and collect the money. He took the rap for it while she got the money and she would write to him in prison and tell him how she was using his money to get high on cocaine with another male and she would write him and infuriate him. The day he got out he told the prison guards to *leave the door open coz I'm coming back*," he said.

### **An Ordinary Average Guy**

Mark enjoys football and is a fan of the Penguins, the Minnesota Vikings and the Cleveland Browns. He has a passion for working out and keeping fit and chooses to walk, rather than ride, whenever he can. He spends his spare time with his long time girlfriend of nearly 15 years and when asked what would most surprise his coworkers he replied, "that I sleep."

### **Officer Adovasio Interview (Source for Story)**

Tell me you're name and spell it please?

Mark Adovasio

Are you married/girlfriend?

Not married. Same girlfriend for 15 years.

Youngstown native?

No. I grew up in Girard.

What school did you attend/type of training?

Elementary school – St. Rose/ HS – Girard / Attended YSU and got a 2 year Police Science Degree – After graduating college I held various jobs and went to the Police Academy in 1981 and that is where I got my basic training.

What was that like?

That was, for the first time, as far as being in law enforcement and trying to get a – it touched base as far as – book wise, what police work is like, not actually working out in the field, two different things – but it was a good experience.

So you've been a cop since...

1982, that's when I got hired here at YSU.

What's your current rank?

Lieutenant.

How long have you been at that rank?

3 years.

What made you want to become a cop?

My oldest brothers' friend was in police work at the time, the auxiliaries down in Girard, and he asked me if I was interested in the program and I said yeah what the heck I'll try it. So I did and it evolved and I ended up liking it.

Have you ever drawn your weapon or fired it in the line of duty?

I've drawn it but never had to fire it.

Tell me the most important case you ever worked on or solved.

Can't think of one in particular, but recently I worked on one at the Continuing Education Building Department at Southwoods Commons, an extension of YSU out in Boardman. Youngstown State has classes that are out in various locations, Boardman, Austintown, and Niles. This one was out in Boardman. They had some new computers delivered out there and we ended up having 8 missing. So with the help of one of the (Boardman Police) Lieutenants out there, Jack Nichols, he more or less helped with case and developed it and we ended up getting 4 or 5 of them back and the rest were destroyed. That was one of the more interesting cases.

Do computers ever get stolen here off the main campus?

Yes. Very rarely now, but in the past they have, some of the areas have cameras but the lab assistants monitor majority of the labs, which has really cut down on the rate.

Does your department ever work with outside agencies such as YPD, FBI, and US Marshalls?

Yes. In fact we work with the FBI and the Marshall's services at times, Youngstown, and if any other case involves another jurisdiction such as the Bureau of Criminal Investigation we've worked with them, that's the state of Ohio. Mostly, through the Mahoning Valley Law Enforcement Task Force (MVLETF), we work with FBI, Marshalls, and various Mahoning County police organizations. We go out and get violent felons.

What, for example, is something you would help the FBI with in regards to YSU police department?

If we need assistance, we just had a case here where there was a subject who walked into one of our computer labs and got online and he used our labs to contact a woman in another state, I believe it was Iowa or Missouri and he was harassing her through the computer and the FBI got involved in it along with the MVLETF and our department and just last Thursday we were looking for him because we thought he might be on campus. He ended up being at a west side location and was arrested out there.

Was he a student?

No. He was not a student, just a civilian who knew he could walk onto campus and use a computer and did it. We had one other case that was similar to the one I just mentioned that

we worked on with the Ohio State Highway Patrol on where an individual threatened the Louisiana State Governor through one of the labs over in Meshel Hall and when we worked with them on it we found out who the individual was and we arrested him, he ended up getting convicted and had some jail time and probation.

In the second case you just mentioned, was the suspect a student? Ever find out why he did it? No he wasn't. The reason he gave was the he didn't want to see the New Orleans Saints football team moved from the state of Louisiana, that the team better not be moved out of the state, through email he threatened him (the Governor) but we got him (the suspect) so it ended well.

Let me ask you about the US Marshals briefly, don't they usually go after fugitives/felons? Yes. Fugitives, Federal Fugitives.

So were they looking for somebody?

No what they do with us is, since I am on the task force I work with them, and that's how we get involved with them, we just develop a rapport with them and sometimes they use our firing range. Last week when I out at the task force we were looking for a fugitive that was out of Akron and we got him out on the East Side of Youngstown. So that's how our department gets involved with them, through the Mahoning Valley Law Enforcement Task Force.

Tell me more about the MVLETF please. When did you join it? Did they come recruit you or did you go and seek them out? Tell me more about that.

Ok. Back in 1992 there was a rising crime rate and the Federal Government was looking for a way to combat the crime, not just in our area but also throughout the United States. So they had passed, I believe, what was called the Safe Streets Act and through that there was money allocated to develop task forces and in 1993 it actually began after being organized in 1992. In my department, my Chief (Jack Gocala) is a graduate of the FBI academy where he attended to 13 weeks while working for the Youngstown Police department. He asked me if I would be interested in joining the task force. Each department in Mahoning County was to provide a member to the task force and I said I would be more than glad to do it. It has been probably one of the best experiences I have had because you work with all kinds of agencies. At that time (1993) it was called the Violent Crimes Fugitive Squad and that's all we did – and we still do, go out and find felons that have warrants on them.

Did you have an initial period of training/ orientation for the task force?

Yes. At first there were 7 or 8 departments that joined right away, some full time, some part time. We all met and formulated how we were going to go about doing this. There were guidelines and rules set because we all had to have a Mahoning County Sheriff's Commission. And there was a summit agreement (charter) set up among all the agencies about how it was going to be done. If there were a violation of shooting policy or violation of rights, who would handle the case, would it be the FBI? Because we were under the umbrella of the FBI or would it be the individual departments- so there were a lot of things to be ironed out.

Great – now would you tell me something while “on the job” that has either scared or shocked you over the years?

I would say, back in 1986 there was a subject that got out of prison, it was a Sunday afternoon and I was working with a new recruit, training her what to do in the case of a being confronted by a subject with a gun. As I was training her to do this we got a call that there was a shooting at the east bound service road and Fifth Avenue. Although it didn't actually occur on campus we responded and once there at the scene there was a woman who I presumed to be dead because she was shot over 6 times. There was a cabbie (who saw it happen) was chasing him and a member of our department and the YPD also along the east bound service road and chased him down into what we call the Smokey hollow area. Myself and the new recruit ended up in front of him and facing off with this guy in one of the isolated parking lots as he came out of the woods. He kept on raising the gun at us and we had to take him down, with no shots fired, but through tactics. We had the cover of our car and gave him commands and he complied. Then we approached him with the tactics we had just been going over and luckily it worked out so we didn't have to shoot him.

What was the reason for the shooting?

The reason he gave was that he killed her because there was some plot between them that they would burn some house down and collect the money. HE took the rap for it while she got the money and she would write to him in prison and tell him how she was using his money to get high on cocaine with another male and she would write to him and infuriate him. The day he got out he told the prison guards “leave the door open coz I'm comin' back”.

# Political Interview

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- ◆ Danny Thomas
  - ◆ 1<sup>st</sup> Ward Councilman, City of Struthers
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# Interview Summary

## Q & A Brief

The following interview was conducted via telephone and recorded with Mr. Thomas' consent for the duration of approximately 25 minutes on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, 2000. The excerpts are verbatim with the exception of some paraphrasing for the sake of ease. Danny Thomas is the 1<sup>st</sup> Ward Councilman for Struthers City Council.

Gura: "You're the first ward councilman, correct? As such, What are your primary duties? What does a councilman do? How many folks do you represent in your capacity?"

**Thomas: "I believe there is about 13,000 residents in the city of Struthers, divide that by four and you're going to get about 3,000 – 3,200 people, the first ward is one of the smaller in number in regards to population, I would venture to say about 3,200 people. As far as the duties... we are part of the legislative branch of government and our duties are basically legislation – as a body we speak through resolution and ordinance, that is, our official voice."**

Gura: "How do you come about a resolution and get to an ordinance and how does that work?"

**Thomas: "Resolution is basically a non-binding piece of legislation that we bring up, for example, we had one last night that was in regards to a liquor license transfer we wanted to see stopped. What we did was pass a resolution asking that the liquor license does not go forward then we pass that along to the *Ohio Liquor Control Board* or we can pass a resolution that...well, we just passed a resolution for the eight grade football team congratulating them on winning the MAC conference, going 5 and 1, so that would undertake a resolution; now those can be brought up by anybody...."**

Gura: "So if you bring up a resolution, (in the council minutes) then they vote on it?"

**Thomas: "We have a committee, the easiest way to bring it to legislation and say during the meeting (for example) I'd like to bring on a resolution thanking the Rotary club for all the hard work they've done for the city of Struthers...then the members (of the committee) state in agreement why the members would agree (or not) and then they vote on it and it would pass..."**

Gura: "How many members are there?"

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**Thomas: “There are three members of each committee. You have a Chair and two other members, now the way Struthers works is really unique in that we all go to every committee meeting, in other words, I go to Finance and Legislation Committee meeting and I have an input as to what goes on – although I am not on that committee and therefore don’t have a vote, I am more than welcome to voice my opinion. My committee is the Claims Committee. We have claims that come before the city council and then comes to my committee, all members are present... council meets the second and the fourth Wednesday of every month, the other alternating Wednesdays we have our committee meetings, so we know that every Wednesday we are going to have a Struthers City Council meeting, like I said all the councilmen that are available go to the committee meetings, they’re welcome and their input is welcome. That makes for a lot easier, you get a lot more ideas thrashed around when everyone can speak as opposed to having to sit there and watch just the three committee members...(everyone knows what everyone else is doing – so that makes it a lot easier in that respect).”**

Gura: “That goes to my next question, is councilman the only position you hold or are you on any other specific committees?”

**Thomas: “I am the Chair of the Claims Committee and I am also the Utilities Committee. For example, you drive your car over a pot hole, you lose a tire and you feel the City of Struthers should be held liable or if we have a storm and the sewer backs up into your cellar and causes damage and you think the City should be held liable through their fault for some reason, you file a claim with the city...The Utilities Committee deals with rate hikes or, a good example would be recently when we were going through deregulation and we held hearings and had representatives of *Ohio Edison* and *East Ohio Gas* explain what was taking place at that time, that way we were better informed as to what we had keep an eye on (throughout that process) probably one of the more important things that they (the committee) do. If somebody wants a street light, they have to go through the Utilities Commission – we bring it up, pass it, bring it onto the floor as a piece of legislation “Street light on the corner of Wetmore and Center Street... (reasons are given why tax dollars should be allocated for it).**

Gura: “What are your views on the following subjects as they relate to the current political climate? First, Political Action Committees and campaign finance reform. So much has been ballyhooed about as of late and many who hold public office have been using it as a hot button issue, not much has been said of what the solution might be – what would your solution be?”

**Thomas: “Probably the fairest solution, one you’ll never see, is publicly financed campaigns – where each candidate gets X amount of dollars and is subject to a cap, any other system... of course any system you implement you’re going to have abuse of it, that’s a given - I don’t care if you are talking insurance, you’re talkin’ welfare, public assistance – *someone’s* going to abuse it. That said, an example, under the present system we have now where candidates are free to raise money to a certain extent, with certain restrictions on them – Locally it’s really not going to**



have that much affect on a campaign... personally I hold two fund-raisers a year, a spaghetti dinner and a rock-n-bowl, and I find that it works just nice for me – then as you move up you require more, some of the perks of the office that you could have, when you raise *a lot* more money, you hire a staff, you travel around the country, things like that, if there are within the capacity of your job – all are *write-offs* as far as the campaign...”

Gura: “So the higher the office you seek the more money that’s going to be involved...”

**Thomas: “Certainly! Because the more power you have the more sway you hold...”**

Gura: “So the Mayor of Struthers is not going to have to raise as much money as, say, the Mayor of Cleveland...”

**Thomas: “Exactly. In addition, they both have a need to raise more than first ward councilman does. There are behind the scenes attitudes that if I contribute major money to a campaign then I should have entrée’ to the candidate - to be a success – and not have them interfere. But where it’s at now though with political action committees and lobbyist, a lot of them are extremely powerful and you’ll notice some lobbyist will get involved in *Bill writing* or something like that and usually once that takes place because you learn there is concern for the interests of one specific person and it’s that of their client...”**

Gura: “Concerning Unions, The leaders take the money and whatever party they are supporting, if you’re paying union dues, you have to contribute to that party – whether you are a Republican or a Democrat or whomever the union happens to be supporting – right?”

**Thomas: “Right. Of course, it is in these situations that, they are still democratic enough where they vote on what candidates they’re going to back, who they are going to endorse, the money then goes behind whoever they are going to endorse. Political parties do that in the spring time – they have primaries, and come the fall the one whom they are endorsing is the person they put their money behind – that comes from the will of the people and the will of the voter.**

Gura: “Let’s talk about equal opportunity in education, and please touch upon school voucher. What are your thoughts about that?”

**Thomas: “School vouchers I am definitely against. I think that erodes public schools, takes the money out that should be in public schools and really doesn’t get to the core of the problem because unless you are giving that person a full free ride somewhere, you’re really not helping the situation. You may take somebody that is lower middle class and send them to a school that the middle class may be able to buy, because you’re giving them that little extra bit of money. But other than that, you’re not going to reach the people who desperately need the education and a jump-start off the bottom rung on the ladder.**

Gura: "Having said that, would it be correct to assume that you hold the view that, let's reform the public schools and make them better instead of giving people money to send their kids somewhere else?"

**Thomas: "Yes, exactly. Naturally, I think there is room for improvement that we need to fix the system."**

Gura: "Affirmative Action?"

**Thomas: "I am a proponent of affirmative action. It behooves me that when it comes to race, they call it affirmative action, but I'll give you a good example, you yourself, you're getting money to go to school because you're a veteran. How many veterans have gone to school as a result of the G.I. Bill? How many farmers get subsidies? Banks are insured by the US Federal Government, no one calls that affirmative action – they are in a class by themselves. No one says, well, they are getting something other businesses are not. Farms get subsidized every year."**

Gura: "What about the argument and the outcry that people who are against affirmative action say that just because somebody is a certain race or gender that they should get a job even though a person who's not of that race or gender, is better qualified...what about that argument?"

**Thomas: "You know what? That is more of an emotional argument, simply because it is still proven that the color of your skin does matter whether you get a job, whether or not you get a promotion, whether you get a loan from a bank, even what percentage you pay on your credit card..."**

Gura: "I guess a fairer thing would be to say, affirmative action versus quotas..."

**Thomas: "Quotas and affirmative action are two separate things. People who are against affirmative action want to make them synonymous. That is not the case, they are not synonymous – no one, I have yet to hear someone say "well we hired two white guys...." I have yet to hear someone tell me they had to do that."**

Gura: "Everything starts on the local level, what are your feelings about the fifty states, the individual state governments, and their interaction with the federal government as far as states rights are concerned?"

**Thomas: "Speaking to states rights, to a degree states have a certain autonomy – they should, but they still have to fall under the parameters of the US Constitution. I think the big argument back in the sixties, states voting rights, I am talking about *JIM CROWE LAWS* – where blacks had to use black only water fountains and restroom and white only places existed – if it wasn't for the federal government stepping in we'd still be back in the dark ages in regards to it."**

Gura: "Electoral college representation"

**Thomas: “I think it should stay exactly the way it is. I did a term paper on the Electoral College and so I am pretty fluent in it. When I first approached it I thought to myself, what the hell is that? Then I gained a much deeper understanding of the theory behind the electoral college and I think that is does work and I think it shows that it works, I think that what we saw (in the Bush/Gore election) shows that the electoral college does work. That is the main thing I think I should point out – our system works.”**

Gura: “So you are wholly behind representation?”

**Thomas: “Yes. The candidate would not have the time, the energy or the resources to campaign in each of the fifty states.”**

Gura: “Uniformed voting has been talked about all over the airwaves, to maybe not be locally controlled anymore, but to federalize the system. That kind of scares me, what do you feel about that?”

**Thomas: “I think the states should still control their own destinies in regards to how they want to hold an election.”**

Gura: “Do you think the federal government should make available funds to the states so that they can purchase more up to date voting machines, but then, keep out of it – don’t try to tell them how to do it?”

**Thomas: “I have yet to see any government entity give money without strings attached. That would be a mess. I think I saw in the paper other night where it would cost 9 billion dollars to implement that...”**

Gura: “That’s a B-1 Bomber...”

**Thomas: (laughs) “Yes that is. Just like the one that crashed in the Utah desert...”**

Gura: “Who most influenced you to serve/seek public/political office and why?”

**Thomas: “My mother. I remember back in the fifties, she was very involved in local politics in Struthers. That was at the time when house parties were popular. What you would do is you would have the candidate or a couple candidates come over, you would invite your friends and neighbors over, coffee and donuts, what have you – and you would pass the hat and everyone would throw in a buck maybe and the candidate would walk outta there with maybe 10-12 bucks in his pocket and that would be a good night for him. But he got to spout his views about his candidacy; it gave him an opportunity to talk to people on a much smaller scale. You can’t do that anymore and I know because I tried this – it just doesn’t work. At the time, it was very effective, I got to see the mayor of Struthers come to the house and all these people and I enjoyed that. I remember when Kennedy ran for president; I had a Kennedy/Johnson bumper sticker on the wall in my tree house.... I recall when Tom Creed ran for president of council, I think I was in seventh grade, and I passed out flyers for him and I noticed he had a bunch of pictures on them of different people who were not running so I**

asked him who they were and he said “that’s my committee” I said why do you have them on there and he pointed out to me that “ you see this lady here, she is Hungarian/Slovak, she’ll take care of the *Hunky* vote – an Italian for the Italian vote, a Black for the Black vote etc. That was my first lesson in demographics, how he had it all covered right there, everybody was represented on this flyer on his committee.”

Gura: “What is it that attracted you to your political party and why? I know you’re a Democrat..”

**Thomas: “My Grandfather. He told us “when you vote – vote democrat and root for the Yankees.” That was a time when you had Joe Dimaggio playing for the Yankees. But the Democrats were the party that gave the immigrants and the downtrodden opportunities. They were originally the voice of the underdog; they believed that government should help people. That’s my philosophy, my political philosophy. Right now, I am considered a liberal which is fine by me, I’ll take that tag. “**

Gura: “There’s democrats, then there’s liberal, far left winger democrats and then the moderates. Where you place yourself in that mix?”

**Thomas: “It depends on the issue. I am against the death penalty, I am for affirmative action, and I think the government should have programs in place to help the people that need help.”**

## Conclusion

The Interview was an Insight into the workings of politics on the local level and how even city and countywide political machinery impacts the shaping of laws and the stirring of public sentiment. This foray into bottom up politics when contrasted with the vast undertakings of those on the national level demystified the process and dissected it into a comprehensive understanding of what this country is all about. It takes astute observation and a willingness to make a difference on the part of elected officials - yes, but it also lies with each and every American – right at home, and on their own block. I learned much from the interview, and conclude that personal responsibilities as well as competent elected officials are two of the most important cogs in the political wheel. So long as that is the case, this country, and our system of government, for all its faults and misgivings, is still the best damn system on the face of this planet.

In the words of the interviewee –  
...”**the main thing I think I should point out – our system works.”**