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| **THE HISTORY OF ABLE** | | | | |
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| **PRESIDENTS FROM JUSTUS, BPOF, AND ABLE** | | | http://arizonaable.org/geoffrey_heard%202.png  **Geoffrey Heard** | |
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| **Arizona Black Law Enforcement Employees (ABLE) has a foundational root in the black police organizations which preceded it.  ABLE is the offspring of two African American police organizations; Just Us and BPOF (Black Police Officer Fellowship).  They were conducive in forming networking opportunities and friendships among African American law enforcement personnel in the State of Arizona.  They also helped to bring African American police personnel together in a way that supported and encouraged its members to move up the promotional ladders within their respective jurisdictions.** | | | |
| **Just Us was formed in the 1970's by a number of African American police personnel to assist one another in learning how to be successful when going through the promotional process and how to acquire more comprehensive police training.  During that era the societal environment was not as pleasant for African American law enforcement personnel as it is today.  Having an organization that the brothers and sisters of color could find allegiance and support was a viable resource.  Just Us continued until the mid 1980's.** | |  | |
| **Bill Crawford** |  | **AJ Miller** | |
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| **At the end of the 1980's BPOF was formed. It began partly, because at that time there were very few African American supervisors on the Phoenix Police Dept. For that reason a number of the black officers came together to study for the sergeant’s exam and these same people established BPOF. The unity in the organization produced camaraderie, friendships and a support system similar to Just Us. It was also a place where the senior members of the organization could mentor the younger officers and help them with some of the problems that are unique to police personnel of African American descent.  Later, the name of BPOF was changed to ABLE (Arizona Black Law Enforcement Employees) to more correctly reflect the membership of the organization, which included not only police officers, but also civilian employees, detention officers, correction officers, etc.**  **ABLE continues today because of the support of its members and their conviction of the need to maintain an African American law enforcement organization in the State of Arizona.**  **In the following paragraphs the past Presidents and current President of Just Us, BPOF and ABLE elaborate on the  history of these organizations and the benefits of being part of them.**  **A.J. Miller, a retired Phoenix Police detective and a past president of Just Us, is a member of all three organizations.   Mr. Miller said in the mid 1970's he and a number of Phoenix Police employees including Harold Hurtt, Bill Crawford, Jerry Oliver, Earl Nelson, Chip Thomas, Brenda Hill, Mike Johnson, Jim House, Gloria Washington from the Probation Department, and others formed Just Us.  Mr. Miller was the President of the organization from 1977 to 1985.  They originally held their meetings at the Jesse Owens Medical Center at 3rd Street and Baseline Roads.  Some time later they moved the meeting place to the Veterans of Foreign Wars building at 1610 E. Jackson Street.  Just Us was also formed to help blacks to promote within the police dept. and transfer into the various specialty details.  During those years African American police officers were not being promoted to supervisory positions or specialty assignments.      It was the unity of Just Us that helped to change things for the black officers on the Phoenix Police Department.  Due to the efforts of Just US and the tenacity of their members, promotions for blacks and their movement into specialty assignments increased.**  **JUST US maintained a good relationship with the African American community. At times Mr. Miller was contacted by then Phoenix Police Chief Ruben Ortega to be a liaison with the community.  Just Us also provided scholarships to elementary school children, participated in the Juneteenth Celebration, and had their own Annual Banquet. J ust Us continued until the mid 1980's when the membership dwindled.**  **At the end of the 1980's BPOF was formed and began operating under the same principles as Just Us.  Mr. Miller was pleased to see blacks coming together again in unity and in the support of one another.  Sergeant George Henderson of the Phoenix PD, became BPOF's first president and was also a past president of ABLE.  Sgt .Henderson served as the President of BPOF and ABLE longer than anyone. His tenure with BPOF began during a period when a number of black officers on the Phoenix PD were preparing to take the sergeant's examination.**  **Many of the officers who studied together were also instrumental in establishing the organization.  The BPOF meetings were a way to meet and share information regarding police issues, training needs and problems on the job.  Furthermore, it was an opportunity to network with one another.  BPOF was affiliated with the NBPA (National Black Police Association) and some BPOF's members held offices regionally and nationally.  Members networked with other police agencies throughout the United States, Canada and Europe.  BPOF/ABLE developed liaisons within the black community and nurtured them.  With the help of a grant from the City of Phoenix, BPOF sponsored a young men's rites of passage program called SELF.  A number of BPOF's members taught and mentored the young participants to become citizens of good character.**  **Sgt Henderson related that some of the most important qualities of BPOF/ABLE was that it provided opportunities for bonding among its members, and created an atmosphere for networking and provided direction toward viable law enforcement and managerial training.**  **He added the greatest benefit of ABLE was something the members gave to one another.  It wasn't  advertised.  It wasn’t specifically mentioned in the Mission Statement or in  the Goals and Objectives of the organization.   He said the greatest benefit was when an officer was having some type of difficulty on his job he could go to another BPOF/ABLE member and seek some advice to help him with his troubles.  This was made possible, because during the networking and training sessions, they bonded: members became friends and friends became brothers.  So an atmosphere was created where you could confide in another member regarding an issue, and you knew it was not going to be spread around.**  **Sgt Troy Holland  succeeded Sgt Henderson as BPOF president from 1992 to 1993.  When he became the President of BPOF/ABLE he had been an officer for only three years.  He took the position at the urging of Sgt Henderson and Phoenix PD Lieutenant Lonnetta Sanders; both who at the time were officers.  He had some apprehension about taking the position because of his inexperience, but he also felt honored being asked to fill the position.  When he began his tenure as president there were less than seventy-five African American officers on the Phoenix PD and very few supervisors.  He has seen a lot of positive changes take place since then.  He is pleased that the vast majority of the people who were members on BPOF when he was the president are still working or have retired after having successful careers.  He said the unity and networking within the BPOF was beneficial in guiding and aiding him to enhance his skills and contributed to his development into a fine officer and supervisor.  He added that it wasn’t one person alone that contributed to his development; but it was the collective cohesive support which nurtured him.      Sgt Holland said he was reminded by members that as he moves up the promotional ladder, that he should not forget to mentor others as he was also mentored and to pull up a brother in need.  Lastly, he commented that the bonds he developed in the past still exist today.  He is happy to see many of the former members have achieved their promotional goals.**  **Retired DPS Sgt. Harold Sanders served as president from 1998 to 2000. (He has since become the Information Officer for the Arizona Department of Public Safety).  He began his association with ABLE some years ago when he was invited by a member to attend a meeting when he was working for the Arizona Highway Patrol out of the Tucson area.  His commitment to BPOF/ABLE was very evident.  Every month he traveled from Tucson, Arizona to Phoenix in order to attend the meetings.  He was a devoted member and faithful to the mission of the organization**  **The positive aspects of the organization he observed were: the networking and gathering of information for the promotional processes, the exchanging of information within law enforcement regarding the African American community, and also the interacting and acquiring friendships.**  **Sgt. Sanders mentioned that in the early to mid eighties he was involved in the National Black Police Officers Association Southern Arizona chapter and also the Southern Arizona Blacks in Criminal Justice.  Both were located in the Tucson area.  He also participated in the NBPA regional conferences and attended one national conference during his time with ABLE.  It goes without saying that Sgt Sanders was an invaluable asset to the organization and he is credited with sustaining ABLE during the end of the 1990’s.** | | | |
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| **Councilman Westbrooks Ex Mayor Payne Sgt Wilkins and Councilman Johnson**  **In 2000 a vote by the ABLE Board of Directors was to dissolve ABLE, and for the entire membership to join the Arizona NOBLE (National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives) Doeg Nelson Chapter.  At that time, Detective Terry Yahweh of the Phoenix PD was a Vice-president with ABLE and disagreed with the dissolving of our organization.  He felt that both organizations could coexist as they had been.  However, the vote was like 9 to 1 to dissolve ABLE.  Terry stood alone and told them to give him their blessing and he would keep the organization going.  The money in the ABLE's Bank account was dispursed to non-profit organizations and since he was keeping ABLE alive, Terry was given $50.00 to keep ABLE going.**  **In early 2001 Terry Yahweh met Sgt. Sunny Wilkins from the Chandler PD and she had recently joined ABLE.  The two of them worked together to keep the organization afloat.  For a while they were the only people meeting for a few months.  For the year 2001 we had eight members.** | | | |
| **In 2002 through the continued publishing of the ABLE newsletter, "Beyond the Blue", our membership increased to 19 members.  In 2003, with the help of Chief Harold Hurtt, formerly of the Phoenix PD, we began having our regular meeting schedules again.  Chief Hurtt spoke at our first membership meeting in May 2003 which gave us a boost in membership.  Our membership jumped to 42 members that year; which included personnel from law enforcement agencies from throughout the Valley and also the Tucson area.  In 2004 our membership peaked at 50 members.**  **That year ABLE hosted the National Black Police Association 32nd Annual Conference at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Phoenix.  Law enforcement personnel and community personnel from across the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom attended.  It was a very successful conference.** | | | |
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| **We continue to have law enforcement training sessions every two months, which also includes networking and socializing with law enforcement professionals from across the valley.  We also publish a newsletter, "Beyond The Blue," that sends out information about training, law enforcement related stories and other topics of interest.** | | | |
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|  | **On April 26-29, 2006, we hosted the 2006 NBPA Western Region Spring Training and Education Conference at the Phoenix Embassy Suites Hotel, 2577 W Greenway.  Law enforcement related training was  taught by professionals from across the Valley and Las Vegas, Nevada.  The Conference was a grand success, bringing in the most attendees in twelve years and the networking also brought in several memberships to ABLE.**  **ABLE has continued to fortify the career of African American Law Enforcement officers and civilian personnel and all officers who look to expand their horizons.  ABLE also believes in assisting the Valley law enforcement agencies by directing interested applicants to prepare themselves for a new career.** | | |
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| **This year, ABLE is going to have its first Criminal Justice Conference which will include its second Law Enforcement Awards Ceremony, to recognize the accomplishments and service of law enforcement professionals in the state of Arizona.**  **Everyone one is welcome to attend our meetings, become a member, and participate in every facet of the Arizona Black Law Enforcement Employees.**  **These officers and many others are part of the framework and the foundation that has kept this organization alive.         It will continue to endure because it was built upon a foundation of commitment and brotherhood.** | | | |