From communicating by signal lights atop Memorial Stadium in the 1960s to using cutting-edge technology in the 1990s, the University of Oklahoma Department of Public Safety has protected the campus for more than three decades.

During that time the department has grown from a security staff of "door rattlers" to 40 well-trained, commissioned officers armed with modern communications and the latest crime-fighting techniques.

In the 1960s, when the security chief needed to communicate with his staff, he called the campus operator and ordered a red light atop the stadium press box to be turned on. Since his security watchmen had no radios, they checked the stadium every few minutes. When the light appeared, they called headquarters. One light meant a routine call; two lights meant an emergency.

The fleet of OU security vehicles consisted of two 1957 Ramblers and a sedan whose trunk lid had been replaced by a welded steel box. State motor pool regulations prohibited owning sedans and authorized only trucks or service vehicles.

"We've come a long way since then," says Joe Lester, who became OUDPS chief in 1991. Lester cites recent advances that have helped his police force. "A $750,000 COPS grant from the U.S. Department of Justice recently enabled us to add 13 officers. We established a crime prevention unit three years ago, engraving IDs on computers, upgrading campus locks to dead bolts and registering bicycles. We started the bicycle patrol and the book bag theft program. We present programs on sexual assault. We use new investigative technology, reducing crime by 25 percent. This year, the COPS grant enabled us to hire a crime analysis officer and two more crime prevention officers."

OUDPS officers, many holding college degrees or having begun degree programs, undergo the same training as municipal police. They could earn more working for municipal police departments; however, OUDPS retains its officers by offering more post-hire training—whether a one-day class on the latest investigative techniques or a two-month course at the Federal Bureau of Investigation School in Quantico, Virginia.

As an example, Sergeant Jeff Harp, who received a bachelor's degree in political science from OU and has started a master's program in public administration, recently returned from two months training at Quantico. The curriculum included physical fitness, management, budgets, legal issues, death investigations, forensic science and drug law enforcement.

"The training broadened my perspective," he says. "I've always considered myself to be a 'big picture' person. I like to know how my work fits into the overall scheme."
The FBI training boosted my confidence, making me more aggressive in my job. I'm more receptive to new concepts, more creative in preventing crime."

Even though OUDPS officers receive the same training, they face a different job from that of other municipal forces policing a population of 25,000. The OU campus differs from a typical city.

"We deal with a young, busy population that changes often," Harp says. "With 2,500 to 3,000 new students moving into residence halls, we spend the first four or five weeks each fall publicizing our safety awareness program, especially on preventing property crime.

"We introduce ourselves to freshmen in a variety of ways. The Sunday before classes begin I take nine or ten officers to the residence halls. We work with the housing staff to put together a schedule to visit the floor meetings, where we speak to new students on safety awareness. Each meeting offers a 10-minute opportunity to introduce ourselves, explain what we can do for them and what they can do for themselves. We enjoy a positive first contact in a relaxed setting. Later in the year I speak to 10 or more Gateway to College Learning classes. There, 25 freshmen receive an hour-long talk on campus safety."

When 18-year-olds arrive at OU, campus safety ranks low on their priority list. They are more concerned about Rush Week, social life, meeting new friends and preparing for classes. They do not think about crime.

Their parents, however, take another view.

"Every fall I get questions from parents about campus safety," Harp says. "They want to know how OU compares to other universities. I tell them OU ranks well with its peer institutions on campus safety. We've worked hard to make OU safe."

In self-defense classes, officers don padded suits and teach students self-protection techniques. These classes have been effective in reducing crimes. As a result, OUDPS now offers the course to faculty, staff and organizations such as the Norman library system.

OU's crime prevention programs would have been unheard of 30 years ago, says Bill Jones, chief of the department from 1968 until his retirement in 1987. How did Jones, a deputy sheriff in Portland, Oregon, land the job as director of security at OU?

In 1968, the OU regents embraced a national trend toward upgrading campus police forces.

"When I arrived on campus, the OU department consisted primarily of night security watchmen," Jones says. "My first assignments included determining what we needed in personnel, training and equipment. We didn't have radios or anyone trained in their use. Fortunately I received enough money to recruit a cadre of well-educated young men and women. Eventually, they would receive the same training and certification as Norman police officers. We equipped them with radios, squad cars and uniforms. To the administration's credit, they supported me to get the job done.

"The late '60s and early '70s were trying times for college campuses," Jones recalls. "Vietnam spawned unrest and protests. Thus, when OU experienced demonstrations—or encountered crime because an open campus can be crossed by anyone—the University had a police force equal to the challenge."

Meeting that challenge almost 30 years later is Lester, the current chief. After retiring as a lieutenant from the Tulsa Police Department, he had life-
"I wanted diversity. In my previous job, I responded to a rape or robbery every night, one negative incident after another."

OUDPS communications officer Robert Smith, left, dons the protective gear his colleagues call "the lobster suit" as Officer Bruce Chan demonstrates defensive tactics to Broken Arrow senior Karla Smith.

long goals, and Norman and OU met them.

"I wanted diversity," Lester says. "In my previous job I responded to a rape or robbery every night, one negative incident after another. At OU I enjoy positive things like working security at basketball games or representing OU in the community. On this job, no day is the same.

"The most enjoyable aspect is being around the students. I want them to be able to go back to their communities and make a difference in crime prevention. We are an important part of their education."

Lester's department consists of three divisions led by dedicated professionals. The duties of these assistant directors change approximately every 24 months to broaden their experience and perspective of police work.

Jim Mustoe, a 25-year veteran, serves as assistant director of operations, the division responsible for patrol and security services at campus housing.

"We're about the business of crime prevention," Mustoe says. "Some segments of higher education believe campuses don't need armed police, that such forces are incompatible with higher education. On the contrary, we feel that the students deserve the same level of protection on campus that they have off campus. That means training. After basic school (at the state academy), we do more training. Some examples include a three-week technical investigation school, a three-week crime prevention school and a week-long breathalyzer school. Recently we sent four officers to a school on fraud investigation."

The public can be reassured by the fact that OUDPS and the Norman Police Department enjoy an excellent working relationship. Chief Phil Cotten says, "The Norman Police Department and the OUDPS have enjoyed a very close, cooperative relationship for many years. Not only do administrators from each agency maintain frequent contact but also—and probably more importantly—the officers from each agency are in daily contact with each other to identify and resolve problems in the campus community.

"OUDPS will always be special to me," Cotten says, "since I began my law enforcement career in 1971 at OUDPS before joining Norman PD in 1973. The OUDPS officers are committed, well-trained professionals who assist Norman PD whenever called upon to do so."

Duncan Burgess, assistant director of supply, maintenance and investigations, has worked 16 years at OUDPS. He and another officer specialize in criminal investigation—matching wits with perpetrators they cannot see and do not know. They collect evidence, perform a detailed follow-up and present their findings to the district attorney's office.

Burgess says working for OUDPS offers advantages over municipal police departments.

"By working for a major university police department, I have an opportunity to be involved in every aspect of police work," he says. "However, the volume of crime is less, so I can give complete attention to a case. For example, in a homicide or other major crime, we have time to conduct a 'text book' investigation. It's the only ho-
micide there. In a city police department, they’re facing more cases, so they may be forced to devote less time to each case. They have more experience in such crimes, but we have more time to use every available technique to solve the case.

“OUDPS attracts young professionals getting started in police work,” he adds. “They can come here and learn how to do things by the book. We deal with real crime, but it’s presented almost like a case study in a school environment. That’s one reason we can attract and retain good officers.”

As society has evolved, university police forces have adopted a “community policing” approach. Any university weaves itself so intrinsically into the community’s life that to isolate university police from the community would be impractical. Thus, Burgess feels pride when he talks about how well OUDPS fits into the community.

“We are the kind of police department people want,” he says. “We are part of the community, not an external force trying to control or manipulate. We participate in University events, and we interact with the community of Norman. Thus, we feel very protective of Norman. We look at enforcement and arrests as a last resort. We emphasize helping someone. The public wants life and property protected, but they also want a police force which will focus on helping them more than hassling or arresting them. If the public looks closely at OUDPS, they see our emphasis on community policing. We are trained and motivated, and we deal with a crime volume which keeps us interested without wearing us out.”

Neal Stone, assistant director for administration, has served 26 years on the OUDPS. His responsibilities include supervising records and communication functions, overseeing the University fire marshal and fire safety and supervising the computer specialist. Work diversity and love for OU have kept Stone at his job.

“I have an infinite variety of things happening and no limit on what I do,” Stone says. “The most interesting days are home football games.”

Stone gets to work at 5:30 a.m., sees that traffic control officers are equipped and out on the streets and parking lots. The detail officers receive traffic box keys, keys to the stadium gates, extension cords for traffic light controls and a packet of nitroglycerin tablets, in addition to other standard equipment, beginning with a bullet-resistant vest weighing about four or five pounds.

“Standard uniforms are zip front shirts and slacks,” Stone explains. “The officers wear Smith & Wesson nine millimeter semiautomatic pistol, two clips of spare ammunition, two pairs of handcuffs, a flashlight, a canister of pepper spray, a radio and a pager. Footgear can be athletic shoes, or in the case of an old-timer like me, boots. The equipment totals 12 to 14 pounds.”

Since OUDPS is one of the few OU offices open on game-day mornings, the officers field dozens of phone calls from people with all sorts of questions. By 9 a.m., Stone is at the command post on level six of the stadium press box, setting up a base radio to take over the department’s dispatch function. He carries a cellular phone in case the stadium phone fails to work and a small 16-channel radio for communicating with the fire department, Norman P.D. and the athletic department.

“Usually, I’m so busy during the game that I have to ask someone for the score. I am not there to watch the event.”

The game-day crew must be ready for anything. Stone remembers the West Virginia game a few years ago.

“The field temperature hit 100 degrees,” he recalls. “The West Virginia band wore heavy, dark uniforms. As a result, over 100 band members required treatment for heat-related problems in the first aid unit. The kids were going down faster than we could transport them in the two golf carts we use. I thought we were going to have to pull all six stretcher units out of the stadium. Fortunately, no one became seriously ill.”

From his hiring in the late ’60s, Stone has seen the department’s personnel, training, equipment and investigative resources grow to professional levels. Emergency telephones were installed on campus in 1974.
The department worked with housing to establish a campus escort service, where students can call a central location to arrange for a companion to walk with them across campus at night. Bicycle patrols improved community contact, and 20 bicycles cost much less than 10 police cruisers. Self-defense classes raise awareness and reduce crime. A newsletter and Internet web site publicize the department's capabilities.

"From being 15 years behind, Joe Lester has brought us current and kept us there," Stone says. "We have quality personnel, training, cars, radios and forensic equipment which enable us to do cutting-edge investigations."

As a result of these advances, the OU community now feels safer, Stone says, despite a population that changes by 25 percent annually.

"As crime rates rise in America, we realize that OU will not be immune," says Amy Cobb, OU Student Association president. "Students must walk across campus after dark, often a few blocks from their cars. Well-lit pathways, emergency phones and uniformed officers help create a safe atmosphere where students can feel comfortable and protected. Our personal property sits in parking lots, offices and residence halls where thieves can easily prey. It is important to know that campus police are protecting our property and our well-being day and night.

"Students and parents often read about the safety of colleges and universities when deciding to invest in higher education," Cobb says. "The University of Oklahoma continues to focus on keeping our campus safe."

Today OU's officers do not have to look at the stadium press box for signals. Joe Lester has given them the modern tools they need.

Director Joe Lester, at left with assistant directors Jim Mustoe and Neal Stone, takes a "community policing" approach in campus protection. Not pictured is assistant director Duncan Burgess.