

# Mississippi's Safest City

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In 2001 Madison was the safest city in Mississippi of the 31 cities with a population of 10,000 or more who reported their felony crime statistics to the FBI, but that isn't good enough for Police Chief Gene Waldrop, who says "any crime is bad."

"Every day we strive to obtain a zero crime rate," Waldrop said. "I congratulate the citizens of Madison and the members of the Madison Police Department for a successful partnership that is working to keep crime to a minimum and the City a safe and wholesome environment to raise a family or retire."

There were 11.8 felony crimes per 1,000 persons in Madison in 2001, the lowest rate in the state. The second safest city in Mississippi was Brandon with 19.8 felony crimes per 1,000 persons. The other metro-area cities reporting crime statistics to the FBI were Pearl with 37.1 per 1,000 persons, Ridgeland with 51.3

per 1,000 persons, and Jackson with 100.4 per 1,000 persons. Statewide, there were 41.85 felony crimes per 1,000 persons.

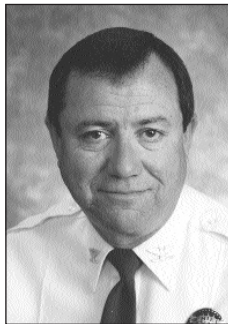
Larcenies accounted for 81 percent of the felony crimes in Madison in 2001, and most of those, Waldrop said, were committed by criminals that do not live in the City of Madison.

The vast majority of larcenies in Madison are thefts from carports, unsecured garages, yards, and construction sites.

"Because Madison is a safe city, many residents get a little complacent and forget to secure their garages and lock their cars," Waldrop said. "Thieves usually look for small items that are easy to pawn."

Of the 174 felony crimes committed in Madison in 2001, there were 141 larcenies, 23 burglaries, five aggravated assaults, two motor-vehicle thefts, and one forcible rape. There has not been a murder in Madison during the more than 10 years Waldrop has served as police chief.

Waldrop credited Madison's low crime rate to two factors: cooperative citizens who provide good assistance to the police and well-qualified, highly-visible law enforce-



Gene Waldrop



Madison police officer Jimmy Brooks displays one of the City's two new Harley-Davidson motorcycles, which are primarily used for traffic control.

ment personnel.

"We are utilizing a combination of citizen programs and proactive police presence to keep crime to a minimum level," Waldrop said. "Citizen input and participation have been a major component of the success of anti-crime efforts in the City of Madison."

In this age of sue-happy lawyers, the Madison Police Department has not had a successful lawsuit against it during Waldrop's tenure as police chief, a fact he partially credits to the City of Madison's high standards for its law enforcement personnel.

"Madison police officers are required to have 60 hours of college credit or a two-year college degree," Waldrop explained. "Most of our officers have a four-year degree. One has a master's degree and two others are working on master's."

"Madison police officers deal with folks in a professional and courteous manner," Waldrop said. "The badge weighs six ounces, not six pounds. Our police officers are not badge heavy."

Waldrop said the Madison Police Department is constantly evaluating the services it provides.

"We're in the people business," he said. "We have to continually look at the product we deliver to our clients, who, of course, are the citizens of Madison. We want to deliver the best possible product."

The Madison Police Department has a five-year strategic plan of improvement that is regularly updated. It consists of a short-term plan covering the immediate 18

months and a long-term plan for the next five years.

One recent improvement to the police department that came about as a result of strategic planning was the addition of two motorcycles for the traffic division. Waldrop said the need for the motorcycles was identified as part of the strategic plan for how to deal with problems arising from the large amount of present and future road construction in Madison.

"We needed to be able to get to accident scenes in a hurry despite the traffic caused by road construction," he said. "They are working great."

The Madison Police Department is authorized to have 34 sworn police officers, though it is often below that level because, Waldrop said, police officers that meet Madison's high standards are hard to find.

Just as other departments in the City do, Madison's police department does more with less. Its 34 authorized police officers is approximately 2.3 police officers per 1,000 persons. The national average is 2.5 officers per 1,000 persons while the Southeastern average is 2.8 per 1,000 persons.

## Felony Crimes Per 1,000 Persons For Year 2001

MADISON	11.9
Brandon	19.8
Oxford	27.5
Olive Branch	36.9
Pearl	37.1
Long Beach	39.1
Ocean Springs	41.0
West Point	43.7
Corinth	45.8
Meridian	48.7
Ridgeland	51.3
McComb	53.9
Horn Lake	58.6
Grenada	65.9
Hattiesburg	66.2
Clarksdale	68.1
Columbus	68.3
Natchez	68.7
Picayune	69.4
Vicksburg	71.0
Southaven	72.0
Tupelo	74.6
Gulfport	76.1
Indianola	77.8
Biloxi	90.2
Pascagoula	99.0
Jackson	100.4
Laurel	108.9
Greenville	109.2
Moss Point	114.8

SOURCE: FBI