

Boston cops mobilize for kids in need

At the same time much of the city and most of the media were buzzing over three bad cops last week, three long-retired good ones were on a top-priority mission.

"Back when we were on the job," John McManus, 75, recalled, "there were two calls that required an immediate response. One was for a cop in trouble; the other was for a child in trouble. Whenever we



Joe FITZGERALD

heard of a kid needing help, we dropped everything and went."

McManus retired from the Boston force in 1981 after being shot four times while thwarting a Mattapan holdup.

But when his former captain, John Dow, sought recruits for a special assignment a few years ago, he stepped forward along with Bob Faherty, who'd retired in 2000 as this city's superintendent-in-chief.

Dow, a Boston cop for 32 years, had founded an organization called Cops For Kids With Cancer, inspired by a visit he made to Ireland where a cops' golf tournament netted funds for a cancer ward in Cork.

It was the beginning of a relationship in which cops from Cork and Boston now swap annual visits, teeing off to help young cancer victims.

"If I live long enough," Dow, who'll turn 80 in November, vowed, "my goal is to sign up cops from other cities to compete in cancer-fighting tournaments, sort of like a Ryder Cup."

But it was a separate project that brought the old colleagues together on this steamy evening.

"We had 17 kids, all cancer patients, waiting at Mass. General when three police minivans pulled



HERALD PHOTO BY HARRY BRETT

CAPTAIN COMPASSION: Retired Hub police Capt. John Dow, a cancer survivor, talks to kids battling the disease before boarding a police boat to a cruise to Old Ironsides.

up," Faherty, 71, said. "And we brought along six motorcycles to escort them."

"Tommy Lee, from special ops, led the procession in what we would have called a crash car if we'd been guarding a president," Dow added with delight. "When we took off, we looked like Patton's Army!"

The entourage brought the kids to the marina in Southie, where The Guardian, a 51-foot police vessel, was docked.

"But before the kids and their families boarded," McManus said, "John Dow addressed them all, identifying himself as a cancer survivor."

Dow was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer a dozen years ago.

"I called Don Carter, our retired graphic artist, and told him what I needed," Dow recalled. "He worked on all our homicides, but this really interested him because he lost a daughter to leukemia. I told him I wanted a sketch portraying cancer as a dragon, and he did a great one. It shows a dragon, obviously dead, with a little kid standing on top of it, holding a sword, but you can't tell if it's a boy or a girl because the kid has no hair."

"I had copies made, which we gave to each kid, along with crayons and police shoulder badges, telling them we'd hang their colored dragon drawings down at headquarters. I just wanted to illustrate

how we were all going to beat this dragon."

As Dow exhorted his young listeners, his colleagues were deeply moved.

"I knew what their families were going through," said Faherty, who has lost a son and a daughter. "So many lives are involved: parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, neighbors, friends. It's amazing how much pain can be centered around one child."

"It brought tears to my eyes," McManus admitted. "I told him later, 'John, that was the greatest talk I ever heard.'"

But for Dow it was just a prelude.

"Then we loaded them onto The Guardian and headed for the Constitu-

tion," he went on, "calling ahead, telling the crew who we were bringing with us. When we arrived they fired its cannon. If you could have seen those faces! I'll tell you something about these kids; the more love you give 'em, the more love you get. Believe me, we got as much out of the trip as they did."

It's the kind of story that doesn't seem to make the news these days, with so much attention focused on the bad apples.

So it's shared in the belief that good cops ought to get a little attention, too.

"Our oath was to protect and serve," Faherty said. "If we can't help kids with cancer, what the hell good are we?"