

Downtown's new beat cop traded a red coat for blue

BY JANEL BLADOW

He walks some of the same streets, looks in on some of the same shops, but now it's a whole different experience, with a completely new feeling.

That's because the former Downtown Alliance public safety officer is now New York City Police Officer Wilfredo Rivera of the First Precinct, thanks to a scholarship from the Downtown Alliance.

"It's a whole different job," Rivera says proudly. He graduated from the Police Academy in December. "I have more responsibility, more authority."

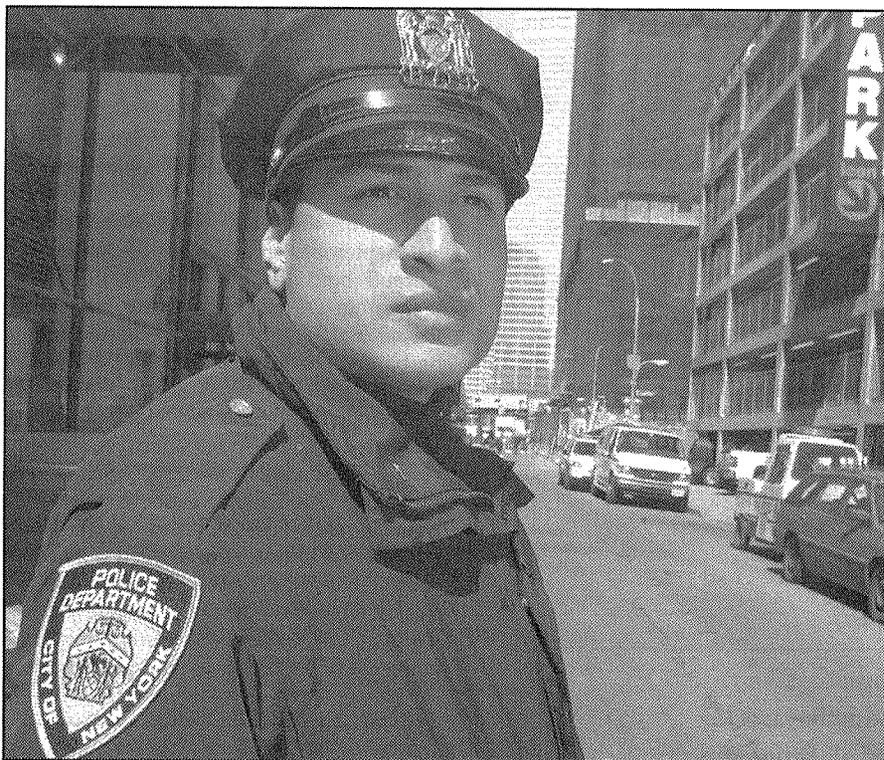
Rivera, 22, took part in the Alliance's Private Security Scholarship Program, which provides eligible public safety officers with full tuition to the Borough of Manhattan Community College. The scholarship helps security officers earn an associate degree and meet the N.Y.P.D.'s requirement that all new recruits have 60 college credits.

Eligibility for the scholarship program requires a Downtown Alliance public safety officer to serve nine months on the job, meet college admission standards and maintain satisfactory grades.

Security officers can choose any major to study. The Alliance sees the program as an opportunity to attract and reward good people.

Thirty-four public safety officers have taken advantage of the scholarship program since it began in 2000. Rivera is the second graduate to become a New York City cop.

The first to complete the scholarship



Downtown Express photo by Jefferson Siegel

First Precinct police officer Wilfredo Rivera stops for a photo on one of the Lower Manhattan streets he used to patrol in a red uniform as a Downtown Alliance security guard.

program and join the N.Y.P.D. was Darin Smalls who has been a police officer since January 2005 and is currently assigned to the 42nd Precinct in the Bronx.

There are currently 63 Downtown Alliance public safety officers who patrol

the streets south of City Hall, helping the N.Y.P.D. keep Downtown safe.

Ron Kearney, assistant director of public safety for the Downtown Alliance, and a retired N.Y.P.D. officer, beamed when Rivera recently returned to the joint

N.Y.P.D.-Downtown Alliance substation on Washington St.

"This is great," Kearney said of the newly appointed patrolman. "This shows the system works. To see one of ours become a police officer is an honor. It doesn't get any better."

Since he was a youngster in Brooklyn's Sunset Park, Rivera wanted to become a cop. After graduating from high school, he joined the Alliance's security force where he served three years. During that time he attended B.M.C.C., earning the necessary credits and marks to be accepted in the New York Police Academy.

Walking the beat now, patrolling some of the same streets, Rivera says that his experience as a security staffer makes him a better cop.

"We have a good relationship," he says. "I know what they do."

Today, patrolman Rivera's beat extends further north to include Tribeca and Soho. It's a job he enjoys.

"I like being in the First Precinct, in Manhattan," says the soft-spoken young man in blue. "It's a different place, different scene every day."

But what he enjoys most about the job is helping people.

"As a cop, people come up and thank us for being out there," he says, highlighting the difference between his current patrol and his former one.

And as a police officer, one thought is foremost in his mind:

"Now I can better serve the people," he says with a smile.