



SANTA CRUZ POLICE DEPARTMENT
155 Center Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

MEDIA RELEASE



DATE/TIME: November 17, 2016

TOPIC: Santa Cruz Police Department's Community-Based Partnerships Reduce Crime

INFORMATION:

The Santa Cruz Police Department today releases the third in a series of five articles about Santa Cruz Police Department's longstanding commitment to Community-Oriented Policing. Read the other articles at www.santacruzpolice.blogspot.com.

Community-based partnerships reduce crime

There's a problem house in the neighborhood. You know the one. People coming and going at all hours, lots of cars parked out front. Maybe there's trash in the yard or loud music late at night. On the surface there's nothing so wrong a neighbor needs to call 911, but it's uncomfortable for the rest of the neighborhood and seems like it could be dangerous.

Deborah Elston, founder of Santa Cruz Neighbors, would say, "Call 911." Not because it's an emergency, but because Elston's organization has spent the past 15 years teaching city residents to report suspicious activity, then work with the Santa Cruz Police Department (SCPD) and other city staff to address neighborhood issues.

Santa Cruz Neighbors, an organization representing a citywide network of neighborhoods dedicated to safer neighborhoods, and now-retired SCPD Community Policing Coordinator Jim Howes, came together in 2002 to address quality-of-life issues like drugs, prostitution, harassment, vehicle camping, graffiti and speeding. While these weren't major crimes, addressing underlying issues could prevent crime from happening or intervene before the situation got more serious.

"We knew we could tackle all the problems together," Elston said. "I think neighbors realize they are an instrumental part in being the eyes and ears of the police department. When they make those calls, the bad guys get caught."

SCPD's partnership with Santa Cruz Neighbors is just one of the many collaborations the department has created to facilitate Community-Oriented Policing over the last two decades. This policing philosophy looks at the root cause of an issue and focuses on problem solving to prevent the issue from reoccurring, rather than repeatedly deal with the same call for service.

"We worked with other city departments to do that: fire, public works, code enforcement," Howes explained. "The idea really is community-oriented government."

Take that problem house described earlier. Through the Community Services Unit, an officer would check any emergency calls to the address and find the name of the property owner. Often, the home

would be a rental and the owner didn't know of any problems at the property. To prevent so many cars from parking at the house, the officer might ask the Public Works Department to take a look at the parking rules for the area. A street light could be installed nearby to deter late-night visits. The city's Code Enforcement officer could stop by to ensure the living conditions are safe and legal.

"That way, you start sharing, delegating, giving out help," Howes said. "There was really nothing we couldn't solve together."

Should more serious crime be suspected, SCPD's Neighborhood Enforcement Team (NET) could be brought in to investigate drug sales, prostitution, gang activity and more. NET responds to specific, identifiable problems within Santa Cruz and, in 2015, made 272 arrests and issued 246 citations.

"Community policing emphasizes working with neighborhood residents to improve public safety. We do this by working together to identify problems and then implementing solutions that produce meaningful results," SCPD Deputy Chief Rick Martinez said.

Another SCPD partnership exists with Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency's Mental Health Services and the Maintaining Ongoing Stability through Treatment Team (MOST) program. SCPD was the first law enforcement agency in the county to implement the pilot program in October 2014.

MOST brings together Probation, Behavioral Health, courts and law enforcement staff to improve mental health counseling, employment and other services to clients, including those in the criminal justice system. The MOST liaison assists with calls involving potential mental health issues and provides mental health intervention and assessment services. In 2015, the MOST liaison made 1,349 contacts and referrals, and 691 mental health assessments while out in the field with SCPD officers.

The Bob Lee Community Partnership for Accountability, Connection and Treatment (PACT) brings together county District Attorney, Probation, Public Defender and Health Services staff, along with Santa Cruz police officers and city attorney staff, to focus on chronic, low-level offenders in Downtown Santa Cruz. In the first 12 months of the program, which started in 2014, 70 clients saw their arrests drop by 70 percent and their ambulance runs drop 80 percent. PACT has proven so successful at reducing recidivism, the program has been expanded to reach clients city-wide.

"We recognize that crime often stems from a social problem and that the greatest impact to crime reduction is addressing the issues at their root cause," Martinez said.

Another SCPD program integral to its Community-Oriented Policing goals is the Parks Unit, which marks 10 years in existence in 2016. Created to provide dedicated patrols in neighborhood parks, open spaces and waterways to ensure a safer environment, the unit also coordinates and participates in several cleanups throughout the year. One recent cleanup, where Parks Unit officers and city Park Rangers removed more than 20 illegal campsites at Pogonip, yielded enough trash to fill five train cars.

Phil Kramer, executive director of the Homeless Services Center and former head of the 180/2020 Program (formerly the 180/180 Program), has been impressed with SCPD officers' ability to work with vulnerable populations. When Kramer and upwards of 100 volunteers took to the streets to survey the homeless in 2012, SCPD offered insight, guidance and support for surveyors. They provided tips as to where people might be sleeping and, in many instances, were there to be the relationship bridge.

“In a way, it was both heartwarming and a little bit surprising that they trusted a relationship with people who were on the street and homeless,” Kramer said. “It helped foster our ability to engage with people.”

Earlier this year, Kramer and his staff identified a need to have a streetlight in front of the Homeless Services Center on Coral Street to enhance safety for clients and staff after-hours. Working with Lt. Dan Flippo, the designated Homeless Services Center liaison, the light was installed in October.

“They seem to treat everyone with real compassion and understanding,” Kramer said. “We couldn’t ask for a better partner.”

Taking the time to look at and address what is causing the crime or nuisance problems in a neighborhood has proven successful for SCPD officers. This problem-solving approach – exemplified by Santa Cruz Neighbors, NET, PACT, MOST, the Parks Units and the 180/2020 program – is a key element of Community-Oriented Policing, requires collaboration with other city and county departments, groups that work with vulnerable populations and neighbors.

“It’s worth doing,” Howes said. “There is really never anything we can’t solve over time with people.”

For more information about SCPD’s community programs and to get involved, visit www.santacruzpolice.com.

ABOUT SCPD

The Santa Cruz Police Department (SCPD) is committed to working in partnership with the community to enhance public safety, prevent crime, enforce laws and protect the rights of all people through innovative problem-solving approaches. A progressive, professional organization, SCPD officers are dedicated to conducting themselves with the highest ethical standards and the department is accountable to the community. SCPD has 94 sworn officers and 29 civilian staff to protect and serve Santa Cruz’s 64,000 residents and millions of annual visitors. Learn more at www.santacruzpolice.com, <http://santacruzpolice.blogspot.com>, or via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterst.

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Anonymous tips can also be sent to the police department through our Tip Line (831) 420-5995, or from our Website; www.santacruzpolice.com . Tipsters can also submit an anonymous tip via our smartphone app or from an SMS text. Visit our Website for instructions.