

# LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT



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Sergeant John Lusardi  
Police Executive Research Forum  
1120 Connecticut Avenue Northwest  
Washington D.c. 20037

Dear Sergeant Lusardi:

I am pleased to nominate Pacific Area's Oakwood Task Force for the Herman Goldstein Excellence in Team Problem-Solving. Pacific Area's efforts, outlined in the attached project had a significant impact on public safety, opened up lines of communication with the community, reduced the fear and incidence of crime, and improved the quality of life in the area.

This project exemplifies how a Community-Police partnership can impact an ongoing problem. The Los Angeles Police Department is committed to encouraging our officers to work jointly with the community in developing responses through the application of the SARA model.

If you have any questions regarding this nomination please feel free to contact Sergeant John Egan, Community Policing Group, at (213) 847-4882.

Very truly yours,

  
**WILLIE L. WILLIAMS**  
Chief of Police

**Enclosure**



**HERMAN GOLDSTEIN EXCELLENCE IN TEAM PROBLEM SOLVING  
AWARD NOMINATION**

**The Problem**

The Oakwood community of Pacific Area, one of 18 Los Angeles Police Department geographic Areas, is a one and one half square mile area that is within walking distance to the number one tourist attraction in California, Venice Beach. The residents who reside in the area have been subjected to blatant acts of violence, gang related crimes and narcotic sales and usage. A statistical analysis indicated the area was at times responsible for nearly seventy percent of the criminal activity within the Pacific Area.

**Information on the Problem**

In April 1993, bloody warfare erupted between rival Hispanic and Black Pacific Area gangs. The Venice Shoreline Crips, Venice-13 and the Culver City Boys participated in a bloody gang war that resulted in approximately 20 gang-related homicides between September 1993 and June 1994. During 1993, the Oakwood and Mar Vista communities reported 123 robberies, 192 aggravated assaults, and 11 rapes. "Drive by" shootings intensified and the Oakwood and Mar Vista residents were terrorized by the horrific acts of gang violence.

### **Who Was Affected By The Problem and How?**

The fear of violence was at an all-time high in the Oakwood and Mar Vista communities. Citizens hesitated to walk within the area and feared allowing their children to play outside. The United States Postal Service refused to enter the area to deliver mail without police protection. The news media quickly investigated the stories and reinforced the perception that the Venice Beach area was a dangerous place to visit or live.

### **Strategies to Address the Problem**

On June 11, 1994, Operations-West Bureau approved a proposal submitted by Pacific Area Command staff requesting additional personnel to address the needs of the community. The Oakwood Task Force (OTF) received 14 additional officers and a full time lieutenant to direct the OTF operations.

Pacific Area implemented an ambitious three-pronged enforcement profile that addressed the needs of the Oakwood community. The three-pronged approach consisted of:

- \* direct contact with community members;

- \* coordinating crime reduction activities with Department entities and outside agencies; and
  
- \* implementing Problem Oriented Policing Programs that worked in conjunction with specific needs of the Mar Vista and Oakwood communities.

Pacific Area restructured the 24-hour patrol coverage of the communities and aggressively pursued an intensive crime prevention program that worked in concert with the Department's Community Policing objectives (see LAPD Mission Statement, Addenda 1). Oakwood Task Force personnel were deployed on five primary watches with frequent changes in their work hours. Police personnel sacrificed their personal family commitments to address the needs of the affected communities who were being victimized by lawless gang members.

The OTF divided the area into 11 sectors and established a patrol plan that provided the Oakwood Neighborhood with a minimum of three patrol units on a 24-hour basis. These units were solely responsible for the Oakwood and Mar Vista communities. In addition to patrol units, OTF deployed bicycle patrols and foot beats that worked in conjunction with participating OTF personnel.

Problem Oriented Policing (POP) procedures were implemented. The assigned OTF officers made contact with every person who lived or worked within their sector. The purpose for the contacts was to: 1) introduce the sector team to the community they serve, 2) generate positive interaction between the community and the sector team officers, 3) solicit requests for service, 4) obtain intelligence regarding criminal activity within the area, 5) and to provide the citizens the assurance that their ideas and suggestions would improve the community they live in.

#### **The Goal**

The goal of the OTF was to reduce the fear and incidence of crime, rebuild community-police relationships, and improve the quality of life in the area.

#### **The Plan**

The plan was an immediate success. Members of the community were delighted to see the officers walking foot beat patrols in their neighborhoods. Residents took note and were impressed by the fact that officers were requesting suggestions on how to improve their living conditions.

Working in conjunction with City officials, the LAPD gathered valuable information that contributed to the Community Policing operation. An enormous 120' x 60' x 20' open, abandoned pit posed a severe safety hazard to the Oakwood community. As part of an ongoing POP project, OTF personnel joined forces with the Department of Building and Safety and covered the 20' deep pit with dirt and concrete. Pot holes that have plagued the community for months were filled. Vacant lots that attracted narcotic sales, gang activity, gambling and illegal car repairs were fenced off, eliminating the illegal activity. Intelligence gathered from community contacts led to numerous arrests of active narcotic sales suspects.

The officers and citizens learned the benefits of using the SARA model to eliminate problems which have plagued the Oakwood and Mar Vista communities, officers became stakeholders in their sector and developed a bond with the citizens they serve. Most importantly, the citizens observed the Police Department as the catalyst for positive change within the Oakwood and Mar Vista communities. The officers are no longer perceived as outsiders invading their residential boundaries.

In March of 1994, an outreach program within the Oakwood community was established. Officers scheduled community events at Oakwood and Mar Vista Recreation Centers; targeted "at risk"

youth and began monitoring their performance; provided family counseling; arranged tutoring for the youths in English, **Math**, and other school activities; established a youth soccer league; coordinated the Second Annual Oakwood Recreation Center Handball Tournament that included many local gang members competing; and initiated the Friday bicycle ride that included parents, children, recreation instructors, and the Police Bicycle Units. All of these activities positively impacted police-community relationships and improved the quality of life-

#### **Other Involved Entities**

The Oakwood Area Senior Lead Officer, Gerry Smedley, was assigned to the OTF Team and became an integral part of the community improvement process. Under the direction of the Officer-in-Charge, OTF, personnel established an extensive community awareness program that provided the citizens with the opportunity to meet with uniform personnel on a regular basis. During this time period, Pacific Area received support from the Mayor's Office and Councilwoman Ruth Galanter. In addition to the numerous community meetings that continue to be held monthly, Pacific Area established an open door policy and invited community representatives to meet with the Area Commanding Officer and the Officer-in-Charge of the OTF.

The OTF assigned a team member to work as a liaison with Narcotic personnel, who investigate narcotic activity within the Oakwood and Mar Vista communities. The OTF works closely with two Deputy City Attorneys that have been assigned specifically to the Crime Prevention Task Force.

Oakwood Task Force personnel attended regular training seminars that dealt with narcotic enforcement, gang awareness, bicycle schools, expert court drug testimony, gunfire suppression, abatement training, specialized gang up-dates, human relations training, cultural awareness training and Mobile Field Force operations. In an effort to improve the superior service provided by OTF personnel, the officers were provided advanced POP training by the San Bernardino Police Department, San Diego Police Department, Newport Beach Police Department and Santa Ana Police Department.

Within a short period of time, OTF and, Narcotic personnel were jointly conducting regular buy bust operations that dramatically impacted the sales of narcotics within the Oakwood and Mar Vista neighborhoods. Narcotics Division personnel coordinated enforcement efforts with the OTF team and provided an impressive level of service. Joint operations with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Parole and Probation officials, the Los Angeles Housing Authority Police and LAPD gang personnel were conducted.



During July of 1994, OTF personnel reviewed over 700 gang related crimes and presented the City Attorney with an impressive gang abatement portfolio that consisted of 400 independent gang member packages. These portfolios were the catalyst for the Gang Abatement Program that is currently being reviewed by the United States Court of Appeals to determine whether it may be enforced. Pacific Area has coordinated a crime reduction detail that involves the Mounted Unit, FALCON (Focused Attack Linking Community Organizations and Neighborhoods, an abatement unit), West Bureau Traffic Division, West Bureau CRASH (an anti-gang unit), Air Support Division and Pacific Area Detective Teams.

No matter how difficult the given assignment might appear, OTF personnel objectively reviewed the existing community problems and focused on combating criminal activity through the use of innovative enforcement efforts that worked in concert with the needs of the community. Throughout the entire enforcement period, OTF Personnel remained dedicated to conducting business in a professional manner, demonstrating respect for everyone they encountered. Due to the fact OTF personnel focused on providing dignified, courteous service, externally generated personnel complaints were dramatically reduced during the time period encompassing September 1993 through June 1995. With the assistance of the Department of Building and Safety, OTF personnel aggressively pursued neighborhood improvement projects

and jointly assisted in the closure of numerous abandoned structures. The effectiveness of the community Policing program has contributed greatly to the success of the civic improvement efforts jointly shared by the OTF Unit and the community members who have embraced the program. Community Policing was fully supported by the Pacific Area command staff and continues to be the cornerstone of the OTF mission. Although the needs of the Oakwood and Mar Vista communities changed routinely, the command staff from Pacific Area provided the OTF Unit with unwavering support and a willingness to personally participate in the community improvement efforts.

#### Results

The results of the OTF enforcement activities are impressive. From June 11, 1994 to December 31, 1994, no homicides were reported. Robberies and rapes decreased dramatically and drive-by shootings decreased by 75%. Between December 1993 and December 1994, the OTF recovered over 170 guns, issued in excess of 300 citations and arrested approximately 1,200 suspects involved in criminal activity. Between April 1993 and April 1995, the Oakwood community experienced a 30% reduction in robberies, 22% reduction in aggravated assaults, 30% reduction in rapes, and 50% reduction in homicides. Because of the well organized Community Policing procedures implemented by the

dedicated men and women assigned to the OTF Unit, the level of safety within the Oakwood and Mar Vista communities increased dramatically.

The Pacific Area OTF is a one of a kind unit that is staffed by highly skilled professionals. Due to the combined efforts of the Pacific Area command staff and the dedication of the uniform personnel who took part in this challenging community improvement project, the Oakwood community has experienced dramatic improvement in the reduction of crime and an equally impressive accomplishment in furthering Community Policing.