

**1996 HERMAN GOLDSTEIN EXCELLENCE  
IN PROBLEM SOLVING AWARD**

An innovative and effective problem-oriented policing project  
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# Herman Goldstein excellence in problem solving award

## SCANNING

During the 1970's the City of Monterey Park was in transition with major ethnic and cultural changes. It changed from a middle class Anglo bedroom community to the center of a rapidly increasing Asian population in Southern California. Also new was an Asian culture where there was an inherent distrust of both the police and government. The Monterey Park Police Department was faced with the ever growing concern on bridging the gap of communication and dealing with issues of distrust within the community.

With the influx of Asians to the community, also came the Asian criminals. These groups of criminals thrived within the closed Asian communities. The criminals became stronger and more sophisticated preying upon their own people. Because of cultural differences, the increase in criminal activity was virtually unnoticed by the police. The desire to make money became the driving force of the Asian gangs, money to support the gang and enrich the individual. They relied on tactics brought from the old country, tactics not seen before by the police in the United States.

Beginning in the late seventies, the City of Monterey Park served as a focus for the increasing Asian population in Southern California. It has served an Asian population comprising mainly of Hong Kong and Taiwan born Chinese as well as ethnic Chinese from Vietnam. Chinese from the Peoples Republic of China, ethnic Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, and Filipinos are present in lesser numbers. These ethnic groups have developed a vibrant community which has changed the face of the region. While the vast majority of the community is law abiding, a small percentage of the population has been active in criminal enterprises which have posed a new and unique challenge to law enforcement.

Between 1980 and 1985, Monterey Park saw a more violent side to the Asian gang problem. From 1985 to 1990 Asian night clubs began to flourish in the City of Monterey Park attracting criminal elements from surrounding communities. A gang related homicide occurred in a local night club involving two opposing Taiwanese gangs. Shooting, assaults and disturbances increased in frequency in the local night spots. Home Invasion robberies became the criminal forte of Asian gangs. Underground gambling and prostitution flourished under the direction of Asian organized crime. In addition, Asian gangs' involvement in illegal drug trafficking flourished. More than 44 kilograms of Methamphetamine and 66 kilograms of Asian white heroin were seized.

The incidence and nature of Asian crime locally are not stagnant, on the contrary is growing with greater sophistication and complexity. A crime that occurs here may well have been planned in Hong Kong with the proceeds distributed in Vietnam. As an example, the number on the credit card you use to buy a Chinese dinner in a local restaurant may be in Hong Kong within hours. A counterfeit credit card with your number can surface on the streets within twenty-four hours with the profits funneling back to Hong Kong, or the Peoples Republic of China. The video or software you buy may not be original, but bootleg duplicates made by Asian Syndicates which deprive the original companies of profit and the buyer of quality and warranty protection.

## **ANALYSIS**

Until the late sixties, the ethnic make up of the City of Monterey Park was predominately Anglo middle class residents. Then in the mid seventies, a major demographic shift took place. There was a large increase in Asians with a corresponding reduction in white residents. This trend continues today, with Asians representing the majority of the residents and Anglos the minority within the City boundaries.

Asian groups have established support structures for the members of their community aligned along ethnic, clan, village, or trade similarities. These groups were known as Associations or Companies. The Associations provided their members a social center where assistance, security and a sense of belonging could be attained while trying to survive within a new and oftentimes hostile social environment. Another type of group that existed was the Tong. The Tongs were semi-secret and open to all Chinese. One of the functions for the Tongs was to provide recreation for the members. Frequently the type of recreation provided ran contrary to established laws such as gambling and prostitution. With the need to keep these activities secret, youths were employed as look outs or "look see boys" who would raise a warning at the approach of the police. Tongs are still active today. The more well known Tongs are the Hip Sing, Hop Sing and On Leong. The Associations aided the Asian community to exist insulated from American society, which was satisfied to allow the Asian community to self govern as long as the problems did not impact society as a whole. This isolationism allowed the Asian gangs to develop and mature in relative security. By the time Asian crime became noticed by American law enforcement the gangs were well established and were beginning to flex their developing muscle.

The need for self protection was also the historical basis for the first generation of contemporary Asian street gangs here in the United States. A youth newly arrived in this country lacking in language skills and American custom would find himself the target of harassment within the neighborhood or school. A reaction to the harassment was to group up for protection and again a sense of belonging. Initially these groups were not overly involved in criminal activity other than the occasional act of violence to insure the security

of the group. However, through the course of time, the Asian street gangs involved themselves deeper into criminal activities. The types of crimes involved petty crimes associated with youthful offenders as well as criminal schemes prevalent in Hong Kong and points East, which began the spiral of criminal involvement that continues on through today.

Initially, the first generation of Asian street gangs comprised members of similar ethnic backgrounds such as Cantonese, Taiwanese and Vietnamese groups with each sharing a common cultural background. They came from immigrant homes where the family's desire to survive and succeed left little time for the parents to give direction and support to their children. The Asian gang members did not adapt the mannerisms of other street gangs known to law enforcement, but rather fashioned themselves along an interpretation of current Asian pop fashion with a strong reliance on Chinese folk tales and outlaw legend. These groups did not fit into any of the known templates of street gang activity. Generally these gangs were not turf oriented. They were highly mobile between the Asian communities of the nation avoiding stereotypical dress and mannerisms, and were reluctant to claim any group affiliation. Law enforcement had difficulty penetrating the cultural and linguistic barriers of the Asian community. These groups posed a new and unique challenge to American law enforcement.

The one thing that differentiated the evolving Asian gangs from any other gang was their motivation to make money. The first generation relied on tactics learned from the Old Country such as selling orange trees to business owners at Chinese New Year for exorbitant prices. They demanded Li Si or lucky money upon the completion of a lion or dragon dance to insure a safe and prosperous New Year. These tactics worked well because they had been used by groups such as the Triads in Hong Kong for generations and could generate an age-old fear. Businessmen accepted these practices as an unwelcome but integral part of successfully and effectively doing business.

The second generation evolved into more blatant extortion attempts dropping any semblance of legitimate business, relying on threats and action to complete the deed. The groups branched out to protecting gambling and prostitution operations or collecting debts for loan sharks. The gangs prospered through their activities and strived to become ever more prosperous and sophisticated, they actually began to run the gambling games and the girls and delved into the schemes that plague us today. Car jacking, home invasion robberies, computer component thefts, credit cards, currency fraud, money laundering and narcotics' importation. The list is endless with the bottom line being profit.

For some newly arriving Asian youths life may be bleak, with only the prospect of growing up to become a dishwasher or waiter in a Chinese restaurant. This Asian youth is often bound by the restraints of family culture and tradition that seem so illogically suffocating in America. Seduced by the gang, a youth is accepted and made to feel special and a part of something important. They are given shelter and food and he is expected to

return favors with loyalty. Within the gang, the youth could rise through the ranks proving courage and strength, eventually becoming a "Dai Lo," or big brother. The Dai Lo will have a contingent of "Sai Lo," or Little Brothers beneath him that he could utilize for profit. Adorning his body with tattoos of strength and power such as the tiger, panther, dragon or eagle he draws himself tighter into the weave of the gang, walking away from his family for the sense of family and understanding provided by the gang. Willing to set up even his family for robbery, to extort or even commit murder for the gang, the member finds security and a sense of belonging. The member adheres to an outlaw code of conduct with a skewed yet somewhat logical sense of ethics.

The Monterey Park Police Department has experienced the first two generations of Asian gangs. We have seen them evolve to sophisticated organized criminal groups with established ties to the more traditional Asian organized crime groups. We are now faced with the up and coming third generation, a generation that embraces the lessons of those that have gone before them as well as willingness to accept all that is bad with what American society has to offer.

## RESPONSE

To meet the demands of the community, The Monterey Park Police Department realized the need to develop an Asian Task Force. To combat these new phenomena the Monterey Park Police Asian Task Force was formed. The task force operated under the acronym of CIT, which stands for the Crime Impact Team. The development of the two officer task force was the first by a law enforcement agency that reached out to the Asian community. Beginning in the late seventies, the officers met with members of the community in their homes, businesses and civic organizations. The Asian Task Force had no preconceived ideas. The Asian Task Force members went into the community and developed contacts. From those contacts, the plan of action for the task force was established. Members realized community involvement became paramount for the overall success of the program. They were open to suggestions and were sincere in their contacts. They asked the residents and business owners what they wanted and needed from their police department and what could be done to instill confidence in the police. The Asian Task Force asked how we as a police agency could address the problems within the Asian community.

That same spirit is present in the modern Asian Task Force which began in the early nineties. The new team consists of investigators who, due to heritage, education and motivation are able to successfully reach out to the Asian community. The task force is made up of four detectives, three gang enforcement officers and a sergeant. It is augmented with six reserve police officers.

The Asian Task Force members are fluent in five Asian languages and dialects. The task force is charged with the responsibility of protecting and serving the citizens of Monterey Park through:

- Investigations and Intelligence of gang related activities.
- Enforcement of narcotic and vice laws.
- Investigations of criminal matters with Asian victims and/or suspects.
- Liaison, cooperation and training with outside law enforcement agencies.

The Asian Task Force utilizes a two-pronged approach in addressing the unique problems of the Asian community. First the team reaches out to the Asian businesses building a rapport which facilitates education and cooperation as well as developing proven sources of intelligence. Secondly, the team proactively addresses the presence of criminal figures in the community by aggressively enforcing statutes and laws.' The task force identifies and tracks individuals involved in criminal enterprises.

The City of Monterey Park has constantly been on the leading edge of Asian law enforcement with a core of experienced, motivated investigators reaching out successfully into a community which historically has kept its doors shut to government assistance. But as the problems affecting the community becomes more complex and sophisticated so must those individuals empowered with addressing problems. There is a need for trained personnel not only to liaison with the community, but to gather, analyze and disseminate local and international information and data. There is a need for sufficient manpower with the time to uncover and dismantle fledgling organizations before they can mature into organized criminal enterprises. They also need to target known established figures for successful prosecution. The Asian Task Force utilizes networking and has seen remarkable results. To assist other agencies and to gain a cooperative effort from others, the task force initiated the "San Gabriel Valley Asian Gang Investigators" meeting. A gathering of investigators meets once a month at a central location in the San Gabriel Valley area. Invited to the meeting are members of surrounding law enforcement agencies, gathered together to discuss current crime trends and groups of individuals. The focus of the forum is to share information that is affecting their own community.

The Asian Task Force has realized that the exchange of information between law enforcement agencies is necessary to impact the problems within this ethnic community. The task force constantly interacts with Federal, Regional and Local law enforcement agencies. Task force members have been featured speakers at International, National, and Regional conferences of Asian Crime Investigators. The Asian Task Force has hosted four Asian crime workshops. The first was held in the City of Monterey Park Council Chambers. The response was so great that the second annual conference was moved to a hotel facility to facilitate the hundreds of attendees. The third conference location was again changed to allow increased attendance. The response was overwhelming as the

department hosted more than six hundred guests. The fourth annual workshop was moved to a local community college auditorium where seating availability could be accommodated.

The Asian Task Force received inquiries from many Southern California police agencies requesting Asian gang training. The training consisted of "In field" ride along shifts with task force members. Task force members educated officers from participating agencies on Asian crime trends. The training took place in the streets of Monterey Park. Many of these departments have since initiated their own Asian task forces and often call on the Monterey Park Police Department for assistance. The agencies that accepted the opportunity for training were the Pasadena, Glendale, Burbank, El Monte, San Gabriel, Redondo Beach, South Pasadena, San Marino, Fountain Valley, Irvine, West Covina, Pomona and Alhambra Police Departments. Members of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Industry substation received training. On a continuing basis, the Los Angeles County Probation Department regularly sends a probation officer who accompanies Asian Task Force members onto the streets for enforcement of court mandated terms of probation. This successful approach in utilizing resources offered by assisting agencies has transformed violators and gained a much higher compliance rate among offenders in the local area.

## EVALUATION

The Monterey Park Police Department has located and identified thirty-seven Asian criminal groups who frequent the community. Some members of these groups reside within the City, but many patronize restaurants, motels and other gathering places. Between 1980 and 1985 a gang from Taiwan established its United States base in Monterey Park. The famed Daly City murder of Dr. Henry Liu was planned in Monterey Park as well as other organized crime ventures carried out throughout the United States. During the period from 1985 to 1990, a gang related homicide occurred in a local night club involving two opposing Taiwanese gangs. Shootings, assaults and disturbances increased in frequency in the local night spots. Beginning with 1990, the citizens of Monterey Park saw the effectiveness of the Asian Task Force. Homicides still occur, but the suspects are identified and arrested. Drug seizures from within the City began to plummet. Houses of prostitution are being identified, suspects aggressively pursued, apprehended and prosecuted. When illegal gambling houses are located steps are taken to eradicate them from the community.

The Asian Task Force recognized that one of the best ways to effectively impact Asian gangs was to become proactive with the youth of today, before they become part of the gang problem tomorrow. Task force members and representatives of the police department have successfully done this by working closely with the Asian Youth Center. For the youth at risk, there is a referral service for counseling with parents and the child.

All Asian runaways are referred to counseling upon their return home. The Task force has determined when an Asian youth runs away from home this is a strong indication of a breakdown in the family unit and an open invitation into the gang environment. To facilitate the family, resources are again utilized and counseling is conducted in the primary language of those involved.

The effectiveness of the Asian Task Force is also measured by the reduction of reported part one crimes. In 1990, there were 3,648 reported Part One crimes. In 1991, there were 3,588 reported Part one crimes. This represented an overall reduction from the prior year of 1.6%. In 1992, there were 3,468 reported Part one crimes, with a resulting reduction from the prior year of 3.3%. In 1993, there were 3,268 reported Part one crimes with a resulting reduction from the prior year of 1.4%. For the last completed year 1995, the City of Monterey Park reported 2,728 Part one crimes, with a resulting reduction from the prior year of 15.3%. The total reduction of Part one crimes from 1990 through 1995 was 920 crimes with the total percentage of reduction being 25.2%. These figures were obtained from the uniform crime reporting data gathered by the police department's Records Bureau. During the same period, the reported robberies in Monterey Park with Asian suspects have taken a dramatic downtrend. Overall, statistics indicate a reduction of 25 reported robberies per month, down to an average of two per month.

The Monterey Park Police Department applied for and successfully was awarded a Federal Grant through the COPPS program. As a result of the Asian Task Force members continued efforts in combating organized Asian crime, two additional investigators have been assigned to the unit. These investigators are tasked with contacting all business owners on a regular basis, as well as presenting educational material to assist them in not becoming a victim. This one on one business relationship has resulted in an increase in the number of suspects arrested for extortion. Most important, the corresponding reduction in the number of reported extortions from five per month to less than seven per year is evidence the program works.

## **PHILOSOPHY AND ORGANIZATION**

The Asian Task Force recognized the national significance of Asian crime and its close alliance with the importation and sales of illegal drugs. There is a need for agencies throughout the United States to have immediate availability of information. In meeting this challenge the Asian Task Force has aligned itself with the Los Angeles County Regional Criminal Information Clearinghouse. The Asian Task Force is in the process of inputting its information into the Statewide Integrated Narcotic System. This system will interface with other nationwide systems. Members of the Asian Task Force consist of a group of dedicated police professionals. These individuals constantly strive to improve the overall delivery of police service to the community. Members attend State mandated problem-oriented policing training courses when available. Asian Crime Conferences hosted in the



eastern portion of the United States and in Canada have been attended by members of the task force. The information received and exchanged at these conferences provide an ongoing network of support in the area of special training in problem solving policing concepts.

The philosophy and practices of The Asian Task Force successfully combated the network of Asian gangs years before the concepts of Community-Based Policing were in vogue. The Asian Task Force utilized the principals of Community-Based Policing while conducting crime prevention programs with the assistance of the community. The partnership with the Asian community that has followed is both rewarding and the foundation for the task force's continued efforts to bridge the gap with this truly interesting and amazing culture.