



# **PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING PROJECT**

## **THE LOS PENASQUITOS PRESERVE**

HERMAN GOLDSTEIN EXCELLENCE IN PROBLEM  
SOLVING AWARD

Police Officer Kara Burstein, #4738

San Diego Police Department  
Northeastern Division



**PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING PROJECT**  
**LÓS PENASQUITOS PRESERVE**  
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**SCANNING:**

On June 16, 1994, I initiated a Problem Oriented Policing Project which involves the area between Poway Road, and Mercy Road in the North County section of San Diego; this is located on the east side of Interstate 1-15, northbound. This area, known as the Los Penasquitos Preserve, is undeveloped except for a city maintained bike path which runs along the old 395 Freeway Bridge. (This 395 bike path bridge borders along Interstate 1-15.)

I became aware of the area because of numerous radio calls of: Migrants (illegal aliens) sleeping and building fires under the crevices of 1-15. Juveniles were partying, tagging, bungy jumping from the bridge, and four-wheeling into the canyon with their vehicles. There was evidence of narcotics activities and the area was being used as a hideout by local criminals. The illegal activities and camping created a health hazard and major fire threat to the Preserve and to the surrounding communities.

Within a month of initiating this P.O.P. Project, I made several arrests at this location. The activity continued as the amount of radio calls began to increase. I continued to check the area on a daily basis, sometimes making three to four security checks within a 10 hour work day.

The area was fairly quiet on the weekday afternoon and evening hours. Through statistical and computer researches with our Crime Analysis Division, I realized most illegal activity at the

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Preserve was occurring on mid to late Saturday afternoons. I advised our patrol units to continue patrol checks in the area. I asked my sergeant for permission to work on this P.O.P. project on Saturday evenings. With permission granted, I volunteered my time to hike, photograph, scan, and analyze the entire Preserve. I performed this task once a month for approximately four months. I became familiar with the Preserve, discovering places criminals hide from the police, juveniles climbing onto the bridge, and hiking trails leading out of the Canyon into the residential neighborhoods. During this task, several articles were found underneath the Interstate 1-15 bridge. The articles were: several pieces of bedding, mattresses, pillows, clothing, human feces, trash, knives, syringes, razor firewood, and warm ashes were placed near the cement walls of the freeway pillars.

After completing the scanning process, I advised my command sergeant, lieutenant and captain of my P.O.P. project ideas and solutions. With their support, I began my 2 1/2 year project.

ANALYSIS:

I developed a comprehensive plan to stop and decrease the illegal activities in this area, which had been occurring since 1986. I wrote my plans down, outlining them on our Department wide P.O.P. Resource Log, and Daily Activity Journals. My plan focused on obtaining the assistance of the community, city and state agencies and permission to re-name the Los Penasquitos

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preserve in the memory of an innocent victim.

The Los Penasquitos Preserve is well known to most San Diegans as the location where Cara Knott was murdered by a CHP officer, Craig Allan Peyer, on December 26, 1986. The idea of re-naming the Preserve in Cara's memory came to mind one afternoon as I was driving on Interstate 15. My goal was to stop the illegal activities on the bridge and in the Preserve, and make this a better and safer place for all of the community.

I felt this area should be memorialized in Cara Knott's name. This was her grave site, and it bothered me to see it being desecrated and dishonored. I focused the renaming of the Preserve into the Cara Knott Memorial Garden. With this in mind, the Los Penasquitos Preserve would no longer be an unknown dark secluded canyon. The citizens of San Diego would know of the Preserve location because of the re-naming. Not only would this be a Memorial Garden for Cara, but for all victims nationwide, a place where families and friends could honor their own lost loved ones.

I was well aware of the intense emotional impact that any P.O.P. project involving this location would have on the Knott family, as well as citizens and police in the community. With this in mind, I began various inquiries into the ownership of the land, and how I could turn this negative

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area into a positive site for all of San Diego.

I researched the ownership of the Preserve at the San Diego based California Department of Transportation offices and at the City of San Diego Park and Recreation Division as well as the City of San Diego Water Authority and Litter Control Division. I also contacted the San Diego Gas and Electric Company, as well as Councilwoman Barbara Warden's office (5th District), who oversees this area. I discovered through research that approximately 67 acres of the Preserve is owned by Mercy Hospital. (This area and Mercy Road was once a proposed site for an additional Mercy Hospital in 1960). After giving a presentation of my P.O.P. Project, Mercy Hospital donated the Preserve to the city of San Diego with the intent to be used as a Memorial.

Before I made any additional plans with this P.O.P. project, I presented my ideas to the Knott family. They granted permission for the use of renaming the Preserve into Cara's name. They were very happy, honored and supportive of this P.O.P. project.

A major problem involved in this Project was obtaining the assistance of City and State agencies. Because of this very large project, many agencies did not want to assist, or become involved. Many directors discouraged their agencies because of the cost, and budget cuts.

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The Preserve crime statistics continued to climb, and I became frustrated with the lack of support. I decided to present my P.O.P. project to the media. The results of the coverage were outstanding. Many citizens in the community and city-wide police officers contacted me for their support, encouragement and ideas.

The directors of various agencies telephoned the police station and offered me their assistance. I met with the City Water Authority and Litter Control Divisions. I explained to them my goals, strategies and ideas of my project and they responded enthusiastically. I had weekly, and monthly meetings with these agencies, as well as the staff from Councilwoman Barbara Warden<sup>1</sup>'s office.

The City Water Authority explained how the Preserve, wildlife, the water, and the nature trails are becoming heavily polluted from the environmental hazards. The California Department of Transportation explained to me how the campfires underneath the crevices of Interstate-15 are crystallizing the cement, causing the pillars to weaken. I began to call the directors of various agencies for their assistance, and support. I volunteered my time to talk to the Miramax Ranch Planning Group which has adopted the Preserve. I took photos of the damaged Preserve and I presented these photos at all of these meetings. The community and city agencies became concerned, and I was given overwhelming support for this P.O.P. project that I had initiated.

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**RESPONSE:**

The City of San Diego Parks Department assigned a Park Ranger to patrol the canyon area, and escort trespassers out of the area. This would help area patrol units, but more assistance was needed to "clean up" the Preserve.

Through scanning, analysis, and Crime Analysis statistics of my P.O.P. project; I asked for the City of San Diego Graffiti Division to assist me by having a "Paint-out" day. Various employees from the Division painted over the graffiti and tagging logos that were on the 395 bike path bridge. The California Department of Transportation installed new chain-link fences, and spotlights under Interstate-15 to keep the migrants from sleeping, and building fires. The City Litter Control Division sent employees to pick up trash in the Preserve. The City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department trimmed the brush, and cut several trees that were used for habitation. The Preserve became a clean river bed, with trimmed bushes, and a freshly repainted bridge. Most of the agencies involved in the clean-up showed support for this project by volunteering their time, supplies and tools.

One of my goals was to clean up the area of trash, graffiti and trespassers. I also continued to focus on renaming the Preserve in Cara Knott's memory.

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The resources used to accomplish my project were P.O.P. Project Resource Lists with many State and City business telephone numbers, the Neighborhood Policing Office, and the Crime Analysis Division of the San Diego Police Department. Before I called these agencies, I initiated a response implementation plan. After the directors of these agencies heard of my P.O.P. project goals and ideas, they responded with enthusiasm, offering their support and assistance.

**EVALUATION:**

The completion of this P.O.P. project resulted in a large decrease of crime. The installation of spotlights and barrier fencing prevented trespassers from climbing and sleeping underneath the freeway bridges. The waterfalls and streams that were once blocked of litter were flowing freely. Bushes and trees were trimmed. Large amounts of trash was collected and hauled away. The graffiti that once marred the freeway bridges and pillars was removed by fresh paint. "No trespassing" signs, and a tall barrier fence were installed onto the Highway 395 bridge, preventing teenagers from bungy-jumping and skateboarding. San Diego Police Department Homicide Detective Rick Carlson, a mural artist, offered his services to paint a memorial mural of Cara and other slain victims, onto the Highway 395 Bridge, and on the pillars of Interstate-15. Cara's mural and colorful rainbow were painted on the bridge one week before the groundbreaking ceremony. I continue to patrol and walk the Preserve. The transient camps, litter and graffiti have all disappeared and the illegal activity in the area has greatly diminished.



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My Command administration was very supportive of this P.O.P. project. My sergeant and lieutenant evaluated the project and were very impressed by the results.

Every goal that I initiated was accomplished. The crime activity decreased up to 85-90% and the radio calls have almost ceased. The Los Penasquitos Preserve property is half-way shared and patrolled by the San Diego Sheriff's Department. I kept the Deputy Sheriffs informed of any new developments in this P.O.P. project. The deputies and police officers continue to patrol the entire area of the Preserve on a weekly basis. With this monitoring, my P.O.P. project should continue to be a beautiful memorial garden.

With the support of the entire Knott family and Councilwoman Barbara Warden's office, park benches, a gazebo and a memorial plaque will be installed in the next few weeks. These memorial plaques will inscribe the name of each slain victim in California. Set in between those plaques will be seedlings of Engleman oak trees. These trees were Cara's inspiration in her quest to become an environmentalist.

**PHILOSOPHY AND ORGANIZATION:**

I developed and initiated this P.O.P. project from the philosophy and training I received in the San Diego Police Academy. The guidelines and pamphlets provided by the Department were

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very easy to understand. P.O.P. worksheets and pamphlets such as: The Government, State and City Resource Guides were very useful and informative. I located many agency directors by reading the City of San Diego Business Directory. I attended both the 1995 and 1996 P.O.P. International Conferences held in San Diego. There, I attended workshops, such as "Ways of Developing P.O.P."; "How To Make P.O.P. Work For You," and "The Herman Goldstein Problem Solving Strategies." I wrote lecture notes from these classes and studied the P.O.P. Seminar Manual. In this Manual, I learned and memorized the steps of S.A.R.A. I used this format to develop my P.O.P. project and I began to make P.O.P. work for me, and I achieved results. I also received additional suggestions and support on this project from our Department Neighborhood Policing Support Team Sergeants, Joe Navarro and Kathy Kessler. Both of these sergeants inspired me by encouraging the format of S.A.R.A. I used this concept for my P.O.P. project and I attained success by using these four basic steps: Scanning - after receiving many radio calls to this location, I began scanning, and researching the crime problems that were plaguing the Preserve.

I accomplished this task by hiking the canyons of the Preserve, and concealing myself in the heavy brush. There, I observed and cited many suspects that were involved in the vandalism. I took photos and videotapes of these suspects, along with the hiking trails, and surrounding bridges. Assessment Analysis -1 researched the radio calls at our Communications Center and

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I received crime statistical information from our Crime Analysis Division. Analyst Pat Drummy made several large maps to mark the specific areas where the crimes were occurring. This allowed me to target these specific locations, including the times, dates, and types of activity occurring in this Preserve. Response - I began to share my P.O.P. project with directors of several City and State agencies. I accomplished this task by meeting with the directors of many agencies, advising each one on ways they could help in fighting the illegal activity. These agency directors became concerned and, with their support, I developed a response plan to curtail and stop the crime plaguing the Preserve. Evaluation - after completing these tasks, I evaluated my P.O.P project by statistical research at the Crime Analysis Division. There, I discovered that the radio calls, along with the crime incidents, had significantly decreased. The canyon was once again a clean, quiet, peaceful natural wildlife preserve. I am proud of my accomplishments and I owe my recognition to P.O.P. Without the development of P.O.P., the Cara Knott Memorial Oak Garden would never have been developed.

On May 31, 1996, the groundbreaking ceremony of my P.O.P. Project, titled, "Cara Knott Memorial Oak Garden" took place at Mercy Road and bikepath bridge 395.

With the help of Councilwoman Barbara Warden, the road leading to the 395 Bridge was renamed to "Cara Knott Way." On the 1-15 bridge over-looking the Preserve, two signs were

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installed reading," Cara Knott Memorial Bridge." These signs were unveiled to the Knott family by Councilwoman Warden and directors from the California Department of Transportation, at the dedication ceremony. The media arrived and coverage of the ceremony was written in the newspapers and shown on the television news. Many State, City, County and Police Department officials also attended the ceremony. Through donations from local businesses, the park benches, plaques, trees, and a white gazebo were donated, for the Memorial Oak Garden, to Councilwoman Warden's office. The City of San Diego Graffiti Control Division provided the paint for the memorial murals, as well as to paint over the graffiti on the bridges.

Because of these P.O.P. project donations, there was no cost to the San Diego Police Department. I opened this P.O.P. project on June 16, 1994, and completed it on May 30, 1996. I spent a total of 375 hours on this project, and a total of 175 volunteer hours. The agencies and organizations I worked with were: The California Department of Transportation, San Diego Gas and Electric Company, the City of San Diego; Park and Recreation Department, Graffiti Control Division, Litter Control and the City of San Diego Water Authority and Auditor's office. I presented my P.O.P. project to: The Miramar Ranch Planning Committee, Councilwoman Barbara Warden's office, San Diego Police Department Crime Analysis Division, the City Council, and the Neighborhood Policing Division.

I accomplished the success of this project from Herman Goldstein and his development of P.O.P.