

Nomination for the 1997 Herman Goldstein Award for  
Excellence in Problem Oriented Policing.  
Officers Jeffrey Giordano and Rene Revilla of the Miami Police Department.

Abstract

With the opening of a new Immigration Office in the Brickell area, parking became a severe problem in the area. Several cleared vacant lots attracted a homeless population who quickly set up shelter on these lots and charged people going to the immigration building for parking. The lots became overflowed with vehicles blocking each other in, parked there by people the patrons assumed were valet parkers. Vehicles were being broken into, towed and stolen on a daily basis. Fights began breaking out between patrons whose vehicles had been blocked in by other vehicles and people were having to wait for hours for vehicles to be moved in order to get out.

Thefts in the area also increased. The Sheraton Brickell Hotel, located across the street from the new Immigration building, began experiencing thefts from around the swimming pool area. Homeless were gaining access to the hotel by jumping over the fence.

An increase in calls for service to this area caught the attention of Officer Jeffrey Giordano, Neighborhood Resource Officer, and Officer Rene Revilla, Bicycle Beats Officer for the Brickell area. After thoroughly investigating and analyzing the situation, these officers went to work on a plan to resolve it.

The patrons at the Sheraton Brickell Hotel, located across the street, were experiencing thefts from the swimming pool area of the hotel, primarily by homeless who were jumping over the fence from an adjacent park.

Officers would make arrests of homeless individuals for trespassing and for parking vehicles illegally, and in less than five (5) minutes a new homeless person would take over control of the lots and set up shop. Due to the nature of minor misdemeanor charges the subjects would be out of jail within an hour or two.

In an effort to solve the problem at the Sheraton Brickell Hotel, these two officers set out and received donations from a local plant nursery and utilizing court mandated community service workers, planted bougainvillea plants along the fence of the Sheraton Hotel's pool area. These thorny plants became the needed deterrence which kept the homeless from jumping over the fence. The plants eliminated the thefts and added beauty to the park and pool area. Then they went to work on resolving the parking situation and offering alternatives to the homeless residing in the area.

They first worked with Code Enforcement Officers who cited the lot owners who are ultimately responsible for keeping their properties clean and secured. However, as fast as the properties were cleaned and fenced, the homeless would tear down the fences and resume business as usual.

Working with the local utility company, Officers Giordano and Revilla came up with a plan to install light poles, approximately 20 feet in length, across the properties and secure them into the ground to prohibit moving. Thus, vehicles were not able to use the lots for parking, and the homeless, who were making approximately \$300 to \$400 daily, were out of business.

Eventually, as they were no longer able to make money, some of the homeless moved away from the area and with the assistance of the City's Homeless Assistance Program these two officers were able to offer the ones who remained, alternatives to their present lifestyles. The individuals who accepted the assistance were provided with food, shelter, and job placement and many of them are currently leading productive lives.

These two innovative officers have been an asset to the Brickell area, the Miami Police Department and the residents of the City of Miami.

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Description

Brickell Avenue located in the City of Miami, what began as a trading post in the 1870's has, within the past fifteen years become South Florida's most prestigious commercial and residential location. An international center of finance, law and business. In 1997 the Immigration and Naturalization Services relocated to Brickell Avenue. The Immigration building services over 2,000 immigrants daily. It is located in the heart of the business area of Brickell.

With the opening of the new Immigration Office, there also came a severe parking problem in the area. Several cleared vacant lots began to attract homeless individuals to the area who would set up shelter on these lots and charged people going to the immigration building for parking. The lots became overflowed with vehicles blocking each other in, parked there by people the patrons assumed were valet parkers. Several vehicles were broken into, towed and stolen on a daily basis. Fights broke out between

patrons whose vehicles had become blocked by other vehicles and people would have to wait for hours for vehicles to be moved. As time went on, more and more homeless moved into the area and fighting for control of the vacant lots became a common occurrence. Lots overflowed with trash from the homeless, mattresses, wooden shacks, etc.

Thefts in the area were also increasing. The patrons at the Sheraton Brickell Hotel, located across the street, were experiencing thefts from the swimming pool area of the hotel, primarily by homeless who were jumping over the fence from an adjacent park.

Officers would make arrests of homeless individuals for trespassing and for parking vehicles illegally, and in less than five (5) minutes a new homeless person would take over control of the lots and set up shop. Due to the nature of minor misdemeanor charges the subjects would be out of jail within an hour or two.

Noticing an increase in calls for service to this area, two veteran officers, Officer Jeffrey Giordano, the Neighborhood Resource Officer, and Officer Rene Revilla, Bicycle Beats Officer for the Brickell area decided to take action. They began to thoroughly investigate and analyze the situation and came up with two very different and innovative ideas to completely resolve the problem.

These two officers set out and received donations from a local plant nursery and utilizing court mandated community service workers, planted bougainvillea plants along the fence

of the Sheraton Hotel's pool area. These thorny plants became the needed deterrence which kept the homeless from jumping over the fence. The plants eliminated the thefts and added beauty to the park and pool area.

They first worked with Code Enforcement Officers who cited the owners of the lots, who are ultimately responsible for keeping their properties clean and secured. However, despite the efforts of the lot owners, the fences were immediately torn down and the lots were once again littered with debris, and it was business as usual.

Seeing that these efforts were in vain, Officers Giordano and Revilla did not give up. They then decided to contact the local utility company with a plan to install several light poles, approximately 20 feet in length across the front of the lots. The poles were donated and installed by the utility company, and secured into the ground to prohibit them from being moved. Thus, vehicles were unable to gain access to the lots for parking, and the homeless, who were making approximately \$300 to \$400 daily, were out of business.

Eventually, as they were no longer able to make money, some of the homeless moved away from the area, and with the assistance of the City's Homeless Assistance Program, these two officers were able to offer the remaining individuals, alternatives to their present lifestyles. Those who accepted the assistance were provided with food, shelter, and job placement and many are currently leading productive lives.

These two innovative officers have been an asset to the Brickell area, the Miami-Police Department and the residents of the City of Miami.