

INTRADEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

May 24, 2006

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TO: Assistant to the Director, Office of Operations

FROM: Commanding Officer, Newton Area

SUBJECT: THE 2006 HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN
PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING

Attached please find a copy of Newton Area's nomination for the 14th Annual Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing. If you need any additional information, please contact Sergeant Ron Gray, Newton Patrol Adjutant, at (323) 846-6524.

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Attachment

**NEWTON AREA
LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**2006 HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE
IN PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING**

BARRY WHITE PARK PROJECT – NEWTON CRIME SURVEILLANCE TEAM

SUMMARY

In 2005, Los Angeles Police Chief William J. Bratton established a Department goal of reducing crime by 10 percent and also placed a strong emphasis on the Department's continued community policing efforts, community partnerships, and problem solving. One particular Area of command that accepted the Department's challenge to reduce crime and promote community policing was Newton Area, which is situated in the South Central section of Los Angeles. Although many community problems continue to exist in Newton Area, Barry White Park was the perfect opportunity for officers to work toward achieving the goals established by Chief Bratton and to incorporate the problem solving method known as the SARA model (Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment). The problem was scanned and revealed that this park, like many others in urban America had slowly been neglected and overrun by criminal activity that revolved around gangs, narcotics, and quality of life issues.

The analysis of the problem at the park was conducted by reviewing data, meeting with officers, and receiving input from local community representatives and park staff members. An examination of the park revealed that there was a large volume of calls for service in around the park, numerous violent crimes, gang activity, and other offenses. As a result, command leaders from Newton Area were tasked with developing an innovative plan that would provide enforcement to a small, but active area, and would not deplete other policing efforts in the division.

The response to the problem focused on the installation of five surveillance cameras with the capability of recording park images. With the technology in place, the Newton Area Crime Surveillance Team was formed, with the mission of using the new camera technology and officers' response to crime problems.

The assessment of the Barry White Project focused on pre and post response crime data for crime trends and officer productivity; the positive feedback received by citizens, park maintenance crews, and city representatives; and finally whether the project achieved Chief Bratton's goal of reducing violent crime by 10 percent. The assessment results revealed that the project had in fact been a success.

- A reduction of overall crime in the park and its surrounding perimeter by 25 percent.
- A reduction of calls for service by 27 percent.
- An increase in arrests from 236 to 343 during the existence of the project.
- Positive feedback received from the community.
- The Chief's goal of crime reduction surpassed by 15 percent.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Scanning

Over the years, urban parks have become a unique challenge for law enforcement for many reasons ranging from the availability of police personnel to patrol the parks, to funding issues, and the prioritizing of crime by law enforcement leaders. In this particular case, the problem focused on an urban park in the South Central section of the City of Los Angeles. Barry White Park, formerly known as South Park, is situated in Newton Area, along Avalon Boulevard and 51st Street. Barry White Park had in fact become one of those talked about “rundown” urban parks, which had become a haven for recurring blatant criminal activity. The crime at the park was not difficult to identify and included gang crimes, homicide, narcotic activity, robbery, aggravated assaults, theft, gambling, and alcohol violations. Some of the criminal activity was visible, but not always reported. Other activity was observed by patrol officers who sometimes were unable to focus on some of the violations observed because they had to prioritize their response to service calls or emergencies. As a consequence, citizens either avoided the park altogether or tolerated the criminal activity. One could argue that various crimes had become a “matter of fact” in the park and actually overshadowed many of the park’s recreational features, such as its soccer fields, baseball diamonds, basketball courts, swimming pool, picnic benches, after school stop in center, and indoor gym. Nonetheless one could argue that in a modern city like Los Angeles, the concern for the deterioration of the park always existed, but had never actually been examined or prioritized as a real police or community problem which needed to be addressed in an innovative way. With a new commitment to reducing crime and strengthening community-policing efforts, Barry White Park became a perfect opportunity for Newton Area command leaders to develop a plan to restore order to the park.

Analysis

Understanding what was occurring at Barry White Park was not difficult to analyze, and the problems at the park were analyzed along three factors. First, Newton Area officers utilized Newton’s Crime Analysis Detail, which outlined the crime trends for the park and the surrounding area. A review of the crime statistics for the period between April 2004 to April 2005 revealed that a total of 36 major or violent crimes like aggravated assault, robbery, grand theft auto, theft, and murder had all occurred in or around the park area. The analysis also revealed that a total of 383 calls for service at the park had been generated regarding narcotics activity, shot’s fired, indecent exposure, intoxication, disturbance, vandalism, and prowler activity. In addition, but not statistically measured, were the blatant alcohol violations and gambling activity that was also occurring daily in the park and near a liquor store across from the park.

A second factor uncovered during the analysis revolved around three large criminal gangs that were present in the park and responsible for attracting and preserving crime at the park. The gangs identified at the park were the Avalon Gangster Crips, Broadway Gangster Crips, and 52nd Street Playboys. The gang activity in the park, based on intelligence gathering, revealed that the gangs were loitering at certain sections of the park, dealing narcotics and gambling.

The third factor uncovered by the analysis centered on the common challenges faced by community elected officials and law enforcement leaders of prioritizing service and working around limited resources. This has remained a factor in cities like Los Angeles, which has remained one of the most under policed urban cities in America, with approximately 9000 officers and a population over 6 million people. For many years, the traditional expectation from Los Angeles Police leaders and officers had continued to revolve along the lines of “doing more with less.” In response, command leaders from Newton Area were tasked with developing an innovative plan that would provide enforcement to a small, but active area like Barry White Park, without depleting other policing efforts in the division. With this limitation in mind, Newton Area recognized the need to identify additional stakeholders, which included city government representatives from Jan Perry’s Council District, the City Attorney’s Office, and the Parks and Recreation Department, who could together develop an effective response to the problem. Overall, the analysis was clear, that for any success to occur at the park, the Los Angeles Police Department had to be the leader and develop a strong innovative partnership with local community stakeholders to restore order in the park and achieve the goal of reducing crime.

Response

Barry White Park had become a challenge for law enforcement because it was difficult for patrol officers in squad cars to catch criminals in the act or locate contraband that many times was concealed or discarded by the time officers arrived at scene. On other occasions, gang members would simply escape through open space in the park to avoid detention. Therefore, the main goal was to use a camera system as an innovative tool to identify crime and use a small group of officers for the enforcement aspect of the operation. The plan focused on one officer monitoring the camera system for criminal activity and then coordinating with field officers to respond to the park to effect an arrest and locate any evidence of the crime. After identifying the crime issues and limitations surrounding Barry White Park, Newton Area personnel composed of field supervision and command leaders, joined together in an effort to research and install a camera surveillance system at the park. The involved field supervisors worked in conjunction with local council district representatives and members of the park and recreation district to research the project and obtain funding for the camera system. Once approval was granted, a total of five cameras were installed as part of the system, which allowed images from the cameras to be monitored at the police station by an officer and recorded on a Digital Video Disc (DVD) for court. With the technology in place, the Newton Area Camera Surveillance Team (CST) was formed, with the mission of using the new camera technology in the park to define crime problems, address quality of life issues, and provide enforcement to the area. Selecting a core group of officers with the discipline to deal with quality of life issues, as well as serious gang and narcotics problems was a challenge, but not impossible within Newton Division. It has traditionally been composed of officers who possess a strong work ethic, skill, and dedication.

Initially, ten officers were assigned to the unit and then the unit was scaled back to six officers. This flexibility allowed command leaders to modify the unit size and use fewer personnel as progress was made in the park. This approach eliminated some of the traditional drawbacks of specialized police units, which many times continue to exist and expand, even though their mission has been accomplished. Once established, CST officers utilized a zero tolerance approach to the crime occurring at the park and surrounding area. Combined with directed patrol in the area and the detailed camera system in place, the officer monitoring the camera system effectively directed officers to make an arrest when violations were observed at the park.

The CST officers also used the camera system to begin to identify parolees loitering at the park and those in violation of their parole conditions. The CST officers also began to liaison with Newton Area's Narcotics Field Enforcement Section and Gang Enforcement Detail to identify active gang members at the park. The CST unit expanded its crime strategy and began to network with the City Attorney's Office to assure that quality of life infractions and misdemeanor offenses would be prosecuted in relation to the park. A system was established that would allow a local City Attorney already assigned to Newton Area to review misdemeanor arrests from the park and improve the filing success rate of such crimes that were many times not taken seriously. In addition, the incorporation of a "Stay Away Order" system was established with assistance from the City Attorney's office to better allow CST officers to deal with repeat offenders in the park, by legally prohibiting them from loitering at the park and committing the same violations. A combination of the above strategies and a new open line of communication between CST officers, park maintenance crews, and recreation staff was established to finalize any park needs, like graffiti clean up or tree maintenance in order to maintain an unobstructed view for the cameras.

Assessment

Determining whether a policy, a strategy or as in this case, a community policing project is effective can be just as challenging as developing the initial response to an issue. One way in which the effectiveness of the Barry White Park Project was measured was by using pre and post response crime data for crime trends and officer productivity. Another source used to measure the project's accomplishments, but which has always been difficult to document was the visual transformation that occurred at the park and the positive feedback received by citizens, park maintenance crews, and city representatives. The third measure of effectiveness used was to see whether the project achieved Chief Bratton's goal of reducing violent crime by 10 percent.

The assessment covered a period that began with the project in April 1, 2005 and ended in March 31, 2006. The data was compared with past crime trends from April 2004 to March 2005. The data revealed that during the 12-month implementation of the Barry White Park Project, crime in and around the park area was reduced by 25 percent. The most symbolic crime reduction was in the area of homicides, which saw a 100 percent decline. The calls for service in and around the park were reduced by 27 percent, with the most significant drop of 50 percent for indecent exposure calls. A review of the CST overall productivity revealed, that CST became one of the most productive units in Newton Area, making a total of 343 arrests in and around the park area, when compared to 236 arrests for the previous year. The crime data also revealed a significant increase in drunkenness arrests from 49 in the pre project period to 181 during the project period.

Yet, CST's success could not be measured on crime data and productivity alone, but just as important, on the visual transformation that occurred at the park and the positive feed back received from citizens, local leaders, and park maintenance crews, which commented on the positive condition of the park. The final measure of effectiveness was the overall achievement of the organization's goal of reducing crime by 10 percent. In this particular area, the Barry White Park Project was a tremendous success and achieved a reduction of crime by 25 percent, which actually surpassed the goal by 15 percent.

Although, crime was not completely eliminated from the park, the Barry White Park Project and the hard work by the CST members was commendable. The honorable display of dedication, work ethic, teamwork, community policing, and productivity by those involved with the project contributed to the effective restoration of a deteriorating city park, that had been controlled by gang members and plagued by numerous crimes. Within a 12-month period, CST officers helped achieve several of Newton Area's goals, by reducing crime, increasing productivity, and making the community a safer place for its residents. The accomplishments made by the CST Unit are meritorious and truly have made a positive impact, not only in the community, but also on the image of the Los Angeles Police Department.

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