

# Problem Solving Quarterly

Reporting on Innovative Approaches  
to Policing

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## New Life in Sacramento Apartment Communities: Part Two

by Officers Harold Bickel and Gregory Dieckmann, Sacramento, Calif., Police Department

*Editor's Note: PERF recognized two Sacramento Police Department (SPD) officers—Harold Bickel and Gregory Dieckmann—with a 1996 Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem Solving Award for their multifaceted problem-oriented policing (POP) project to address serious crime and quality-of-life problems in two public housing communities. They adopted a two-tiered approach: First, they addressed gang and drug problems, using a combination of selected enforcement and environmental changes to thwart the activities of gang members and drug dealers, who were often one and the same. Second recognizing the need for greater community ownership and involvement, the officers instituted a second problem-solving component to address community mobilization. The drug and gang problem-solving approach was detailed in the winter 1997 issue of Problem Solving Quarterly. The community mobilization effort is described here.*

've years ago, Officers Harold Bickel and Greg Dieckmann were selected to work exclusively in what was then the most violent area of Sacramento. The New Helvetia and River Oaks apartment complexes consisted of 800-plus units of low-income housing owned and operated by the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Authority (SHRA).

Gang and narcotics problems created a neighborhood that was effectively a war zone. In 1991, there were over 1,900 calls for service in the area—two-and-a-half calls per household—and over 470 reported crimes, of which 57 were assaults. Narcotic arrests and "buy" programs, coupled with two supplemental overtime officers seven nights a week, failed to make any significant long-term improvements. In 1992, calls for service peaked at 2,350—three calls per household. What was worse was that many crimes were never reported, and the method of reporting underestimated the percentage of crimes related to drugs.

Gangs and related drug dealing had a rich history in New Helvetia and River Oaks. Violent competition for the drug trade fueled assaults, gun battles and homicides. Residents were afraid to leave their homes at night, and fearful tenants allowed dealers to use their homes as safe havens. Poor lighting, lack of parking (leading residents to park on their front lawns) and gang members' speeding through the complex at over 50 miles per hour added to the disorder and danger of

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## Sweeping Program Eliminates Cruising

by Investigator Stephen Colon, Santa Ana, Calif., Police Department

Teenagers cruising up and down the main boulevard looking for fun and romance is nothing new. Started in the 1950s, cruising has since become entrenched in American society, where fancy cars are a status symbol. Glamorized by Hollywood in movies such as "American Graffiti," cruising has become a rite of passage for today's youths. Though enjoyable for teens, cruising has always been a problem for police and the public. In the best cases, cruising results in heavy traffic congestion, litter, noise and general disorder. Add gangs to the mix, as in Santa Ana, and violence quickly erupts.

Cruisers had been coming to Santa Ana for nearly two decades when, in the early 1990s, the problem became an epidemic. As gang membership rose, so did the level of violence on cruiser nights. Developing a law enforcement response to a problem that had existed for so long was a daunting task

At the beginning of this decade, the Santa Ana Police Department began implementing a community-oriented policing philosophy under Chief Paul Walters' lead-

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## ***Apartments from paged*** life in New Helvetia and River Oaks.

Officers Bickel and Dieckmann entered this environment as Sacramento's first Neighborhood Police Officers (NPOs), assigned to the communities full-time. Their task was to use the problem-oriented policing SARA model (scanning, analysis, response, assessment) to improve life and reduce crime in these troubled areas. While ridding the complexes of drug and gang activity by arresting offenders and making environmental improvements, the officers concentrated on mobilizing the law-abiding community to take ownership of their neighborhood. The NPOs' first and continued priority was to strive for a mobilized community able to combat the underlying conditions of crime and disorder once the POP project ended. In a mobilized community, residents work cohesively with other community members and other outside resources to solve neighborhood problems. These partnerships must ultimately be strong enough to sustain community improvements without a constant police presence.

### **Scanning**

**Mobilization is of paramount importance, yet extremely difficult in public housing. The reasons for this are varied but center around a few themes. Life in housing projects is unique, mandating innovative solutions to the underlying conditions that created problems in New Helvetia and River Oaks. In these two developments, the fear of crime was extremely high. Most tenants were unemployed, relying on government assistance to support them and their families. They often resented the frequent police presence, as if "big brother" were watching. These factors contributed to a sense of community apathy and helplessness. Not being property owners, the residents decreased their personal stake in the community and exacerbated the neighborhood's problems. Many felt so powerless and insignificant that they did not become involved in the community unless something traumatic happened to them or someone close to them.**

Most heads of households were single women receiving Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Many found it hard to survive economically, especially with the large amount of drug and alcohol abuse present. Some residents chose to "double down" their monthly checks by purchasing drugs and selling them for a 100 percent profit. Often, the catalyst for this "double down" phenomenon was the predator of low-income communities—the young male gangster. Gangsters often used single women, their apartments and their hospitality for a short time, then frequently moved on to the next woman. These young men could easily demonstrate material success compared to those who were not involved in drug sales. They often coerced the women into peddling their drugs, only to leave the women with the resulting drug arrest **or eviction** and move **on** to the next victim. These types of men are responsible for a significant amount of crime in public housing areas, and are tough to track down **because** of their mobility.

With the large number of AFDC moms came a large number of kids in the complexes—estimated at 40 percent of the **population**. The actual number of children, specifically in the summer and after school, was **much higher due to the developments' being used as a children's day-care community. Many of these mothers and other unemployed community members had extended families outside the community. While these relatives went to school and work, their children stayed with family members living in River Oaks or New Helvetia. Too often these kids were unsupervised and left to roam the complexes, resulting in juvenile mischief and crime and further deteriorating both communities. Many of the easily influenced young people were swept up by the various gangs that overwhelmed the area, increasing the already serious gang and drug problem.**

Another concern was the **lack of community role models. Although most of those living in River Oaks and New Helvetia were law-abiding people, those who set goals and worked to improve their position in life quickly moved out of**

the projects. The **financially** successful residents who remained *were* drug dealers, who in the eyes of impoverished children, had success and wealth. These "role models" were given prestige by the community due to their money and physical power.

A final concern was lack of cooperation from the authorities, fueled by residents' fear of being labeled a "snitch." Even the law-abiding citizens were hesitant to "snitch" for fear of being labeled an outcast by other community members, and to avoid the legitimate threat of retaliation.

The NPOs **arrived** in the complexes in June 1992, **and** began developing information about community activities. This information came from various sources, **including property managers, resident councils, district officers, surveys, door-to-door conversations with adults, and conversations with children around the two complexes. As Officers Dieckmann and Bickel spoke with these valuable sources, several issues became clear that inhibited community members from getting involved in positive activities. The four problems identified as barriers to mobilization were as follows:**

**The population distrusted government officials, including police.**

**Both children and adults felt there were no positive activities for the youths to become involved in.**

- **There was a lack of outside agencies and/or resources available in the community to assist tenants.**
- **There was little or no interaction between people of different ethnic origins.**

**Although these were certainly not the only problems inhibiting community mobilization, the NPOs and community felt these were the most urgent. Once the issues were identified, Dieckmann and Bickel began collecting information on them during the analysis phase.**

## Analysis: Distrust of Government

The River Oaks and New Helvetia communities have always had a large police presence due to the high crime rate, attributed to the abnormally high amount of gang and drug activity. As the crime rate soared in the area, so did the number of police calls for service. This high rate of calls for service forced an increased allocation of police, particularly because many of the police calls involved violence and required three or more police officers to respond. Before the NPOs' arrival, there was one arrest per every two households, and virtually every resident had some type of contact with police officers. Unfortunately, many of these contacts were not positive. In many cases, police arrested someone's brother, mother or friend and sped off to the next call for service. These police officers were not trained in long-term problem solving and did not concern themselves with mobilization efforts. They did what they were trained to do—find the culprit and arrest him or her, being careful not to get hurt in the process. Unfortunately, the **byproduct** of this reactive police service was poor relations with the community.

The residents of both communities not only had deteriorating relations with police, but with other government entities as well. The tenants relied almost solely on the government for all their basic needs, such as food and medical care. Most were on a fixed government income provided by AFDC, Social Security Insurance or General Aid. They were continually reminded of their dependence by their County of Sacramento checks, Medicare cards and food stamps. To make things worse, they lived in the "projects," also run by the government. All these factors fed the feeling of "big brother" watching them, constantly verifying their income or checking to make sure they did not have a live-in boyfriend or girlfriend with an additional income. When these large bureaucratic service providers broke down, as often happened, the tenants of River Oaks and New Helvetia became the victims and poor relations resulted.

## Analysis: Lack of Positive Activities

The second issue analyzed was the lack of positive activities for children. Most parents, during the first year of the POP program, did not care about getting involved in community activities or reporting drug dealers on the corners, but they were deeply concerned about their children's welfare. There were a few children's programs around before the NPOs arrive; most were provided by Sacramento Parks and Recreation, SHRA's Family Services Division and the resident councils. It became apparent that these programs did not reach most of the children and very few community parents were involved in any of them.

The officers believed that the lack of positive choices for many of the children in previous years became a catalyst for the severe gang problem in the community. This concern was supported by several studies that indicate that children often get into trouble during their discretionary time between after school and early evening. To effect positive long-term **change by decreasing the level of gang activity, the lack of children's activities had to be reversed.**

## Analysis: Outside Resources

The third factor that inhibited mobilization was the lack of resources or partners from outside the community. In River Oaks and New Helvetia, there were many social problems requiring assistance, the foremost being the extremely high level of substance abuse. Many tenants were battling alcohol and drugs, but sadly, there were no social services available to community members. Other problems, such as troubled youths getting into crime or dropping out of school, were also not addressed. Additionally, there was a large population of elderly or disabled people, yet no readily available resources for them. Essentially, these communities were on an island within the city.

If a community is to attempt to improve their neighborhood, individual

tenants need to get their own lives in order before concerning themselves with their neighbors' welfare. If they are to concern themselves with the wider drug and gang problem, they need to know where their own sons and daughters are, and gain control over their own substance abuse problems.

## Analysis: Ethnic Diversity

The last issue related to mobilization was the ethnic diversity of the **neighborhood**. The communities were one-third Hispanic and Caucasian, one-third African American and one-third Asian. The Asian population included many different cultures including Chinese, Vietnamese, Laotian, **Hmong and Mein**. With this **richness came a host of language barriers and cultural stereotypes** that were hurdles to social interaction **among community members**. Residents' lack of education combined with a dense **population** exacerbated ignorance of other races and ethnicities. Adults and children of **one group** rarely socialized with those of a different **background**. This was far more true with **the adult population than the children, primarily due to the language barrier**. Another challenge was that many Asian cultures distrusted the police, a factor generally attributed to the brutality of police forces in Asian countries. This fear of the police was very real, **since many of the community members had been in America for only a short time.**

## Analysis Model: Mobilization Grid

These community characteristics did not occur overnight, but manifested slowly over the years. To place these overwhelming issues into a manageable format, the NPOs formulated them into a theoretical model. Once this conceptual framework was developed, it became a valuable tool, enabling the NPOs to conceptualize these difficult issues as related topics. This allowed them to activate a systematic response tailor-made for the River Oaks

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*Apartments* from page 3 and New Helvetia complexes, rather than be overwhelmed by these perplexing social manifestations.

This conceptual model became known as the Mobilization Grid. The communities were seen as a grid with intersecting vertical and horizontal lines. Each vertical line represented a different segment of the community, such as different races and service providers. The horizontal lines represented the ages of community members, with the lowest representing the youngest children in the community.

Officers Dieckmann and Bickel theorized that the most effective way to mobilize the community was through the children. First, the children were more apt to have a favorable relationship with police because they had fewer preconceived notions about law enforce-

ment. Second, the children were more likely to socialize with children of other nationalities, because they had less of a language barrier, and were acquainted with each other from school. Thus, both adults and children felt there were no positive activities for the children to participate in. Fourth, without positive alternatives, many of the children were unable to fight the peer pressure of the gangs that dominated the community.

The officers believed that once they established after-school programs, they would be able to assist in the socialization of children from all cultural backgrounds. Once in a successful program, the children would be less inclined to do poorly in school or be pulled into a gang. Additionally, the parents would respect the NPOs once they realized the officers were helping neighborhood youths. Finally, once a youth program was established, the parents of the ethnically diverse children would be asked to assist with the program, enabling them to begin socializing with people of other races and become more involved in the community.

## MOBILIZATION GRID

### Different Community Groups

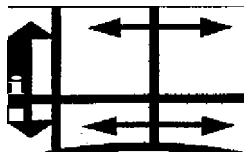
Asian Black Hisp/White SIIRA Other

Parents

Adult mobilization (center)

16-20

Vertical movement by adults and youths



Youth mobilization (V Team)

8-15



Indicates community interaction between the various ethnic and age groups (mobilization)

The Mobilization Grid is explained in more detail below. As the officers' strategies changed to respond to community problems, the Mobilization Grid was adapted.

### Response: Distrust of Government

Officer Dieckmann and Bickel's responses to the community's distrust of government varied considerably due to the issue's complexity. Two of their responses were termed "soft mobilization" and "media blackout."

*Soft Mobilization.* Through the years, both communities had seen many programs come and go. These government attempts to improve the residents' quality of life fell under both the social service and law enforcement umbrellas. The tenants had seen a plethora of welfare changes labeled with a variety of names, and a comparable number of law enforcement efforts with catchy slogans, all of which were meant to improve their quality

of life. These programs had come and gone, with those involved rarely asking the community what its problems were, and the programs never improving the community for the long term. Officers Dieckmann and Bickel did not want to enter the community inheriting all the failures of the past programs. Nor did they want to come into the community forcibly, armed with preconceived notions of problems and solutions, making promises they could not keep. Instead, the officers wanted to slowly integrate into the mainstream of the community. Only when they were truly accepted in the community could they hear the true problems and adequately work with the residents to solve them. As the officers entered the community, there was no parade, no speeches, no city dignitary cutting a yellow ribbon with an oversized pair of scissors. Officers Dieckmann and Bickel simply moved their equipment quietly

into their offices and began slowly building relationships with community members. In this way, the officers mobilized softly, on the community's terms.

*Media Blackout.* Second, there was no announcement of the officers' arrival. Though many residents knew of their arrival via word of mouth based on conversations with property managers and resident councils, there was no media release of any kind. In many cases, communities such as River Oaks and New Helvetia reject mainstream media. Additionally, the officers wanted the community to learn of their arrival directly, as they met in the neighborhood, not from some well-dressed, nameless television personality. Officers Dieckmann and Bickel also requested from the newly decentralized police department administration permission to refuse all media requests for the first year of the program. This request became tougher as the later success of the program became realized. The first success story published in a local paper was published in spite of the officers' never granting an interview, and featured a photograph of their locked office door.

At the heart of the POP strategy is the idea that the neighborhood plays an active part in not only identifying the problems, but solving them *as well*. The *officers* thus kept SHRA and the resident councils of both communities briefed about their activities. The NPOs waited until they were invited to the monthly resident council meetings (an example of soft mobilization). Once invited, they attended and informed the tenants of their activities. In this forum, the officers asked the council what functions they would like them to perform and asked their permission or approval for a particular program. For example, the NPOs presented their ideas on a neighborhood watch program. The council then voted for this tactic, and later the officers trained volunteers from both complexes.

To integrate themselves into the communities, Officers Dieckmann and Bickel made an effort to appear as people, not just as cops. In many cases, when police **interact with the public, all the public sees is the badge on the chest and the gun at the side. The officers took steps to minimize this phenomenon and reduce the stereotypical perceptions the public has of police. For example, they took off their police equipment and put on shorts and high-tops to play basketball with neighborhood teenagers, and got dressed up to go to the neighborhood dances. These actions helped break down the barriers between the community and the officers, and facilitated communication.**

## Response: Working with Youths

Upon arriving in the developments, the officers knew of the demographics describing the large youth population, but rarely observed any children during the evening hours. They soon learned that most children were not allowed outside after sunset due to the violence that permeated the streets at night. To meet the children, Dieckmann and Bickel began going to the Jedediah Smith Elementary School and California Middle School. They were invited to teach safety classes to the children and to speak with parents

on "Teacher-Parent Day;" thus establishing rapport with many of the children. Soon the children wrote letters requesting that the officers speak at their graduation ceremonies. Later, the officers took the children on trips such as a tour of the state capitol and a trip to Victory Outreach, which is a group of reformed juvenile offenders who put on realistic and educational plays.

As the children became more comfortable with Dieckmann and Bickel, they began spending time at the neighborhood police station. Soon the office became a social hub for the kids and a place where they could find help with their homework. The officers acquired some sports equipment and began checking out the equipment to children. Children are naturally curious about police work, so the officers started a program called "Kids on Patrol." **The officers and children met at a designated time, and the officers would go out on foot patrol with the kids allowed to come along. The officers explained why police do what they do, and taught them how to behave if a police officer stops to talk to them. All the officers' equipment was explained to the kids, and the kids took turns singing the "COPS" television show's theme song on the patrol loud-speaker.**

During the program's first year, SHRA was in the process of applying for a Drug Elimination Grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Officers Dieckmann and Bickel requested a small grant within the larger application to obtain funds for a formal youth program. The application was accepted and the officers were awarded \$3,000 in "seed" money to begin the program, which would be called the V Team.

## Response: V Team Youth Program

The V (for victory) Team focused on at-risk children between 8 and 12 years of age. The officers accepted referrals of troubled children from schools, parents and resident councils, as well as relying on their own observations. This youth

program started in the New Helvetia complex *with* twice-weekly meetings. The program soon expanded to River Oaks with four meetings a week. Soon mothers from the community frequently volunteered their time. Later, as the program grew, SHRA provided \$30,000 to continue the program and fund four staff members to assist in running, and to eventually take over, the program. By the **end** of the first year, the officers were working with 60 children.

The meetings were divided into two segments. The first hour was dedicated to strength of mind, and the second hour to strength of body. During the first hour, the children worked on their homework. The size of the team was kept at a manageable level to ensure **tutoring on a one-to-one basis. As the program developed, residents of the neighboring affluent Land Park area donated unwanted computers and educational software for the V Team's use. These computers helped children improve their reading comprehension and mathematics skills. Additionally, the staff met frequently with the children's teachers and parents to ensure that the NPOs were kept up to date on the youths' attendance, academic status and behavior.**

**During the second hour, the children took part in a series of spirited sports activities and 'drills that emphasized a strong work ethic, team spirit and a sense of accomplishment**

The entire program was based on a rewards system. **If the children acted appropriately at practice, brought their homework from school and had a 100 percent attendance rate, they were rewarded with team uniforms and field trips. The uniforms consisted of a hat, shirt, shorts and jacket with professionally designed "Kids in the Hood" logos. Each piece of clothing was earned one at a time, creating a work ethic and sense of accomplishment. The purple uniforms also created a strong sense of team unity.**

The leisure and/or educational field trips were designed to expose children to places and activities that, in most cases,

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they had never experienced. Additionally, the NPOs hoped that exposure to these places and activities would educate the children about a variety of recreational and job opportunities that could become part of their future.

Many of the team's expenditures and field trips relied on a variety of partnerships with resources beyond the boundaries of River Oaks and New Helvetia. By creating these partnerships, the NPOs began pulling resources into both communities. The field trips included trips to sporting events, outdoor activities such as hiking and rafting, trips to amusement parks, a barbecue and an educational trip to Old Sacramento. Partnerships established with other resources included the following:

- The local elementary and middle schools provided a list of all students having behavioral and educational problems who lived in the River Oaks and New Helvetia developments. These children were later recruited onto the V Team.
- The V Team **logo design WAS donated by a local graphic designer. The clothing was donated at cost by a local clothing and embroidery shop.**
- The Police Athletic League (PAL) donated basketballs.
- Several Land Park residents and businesses donated sports equipment, books and computers.
- SHRA donated a computer, and a New Helvetia resident donated 15 educational software programs and computer expertise.
- The Lake Tahoe Rangers donated their time during a trip to the Lake Tahoe Basin.
- A recently "jumped out" ex-gang member from the area gave a spirited presentation on the pitfalls of gang life and drug abuse.

An ex-gang member/outlaw biker gave a presentation on the effects of drug abuse and the importance of making the right choices in life.

Numerous local college students, high school students, teenagers and parents volunteered their time for the team meetings.

- The Sacramento Police Officers Association donated food for a field trip.
- The Coca-Cola Bottling Corporation donated refreshments for several outings.
- Two county probation officers donated several hours teaching the youths how to swim, which led to a rafting trip down the American River.
- The NPOs gave the youths 30 reconditioned bicycles for Christmas. Safety helmets were donated by a local news station, a Sacramento fire station cleaned the bikes, a **local bike shop** donated the necessary repairs, and SPD dispatchers donated \$200 for additional Christmas gifts.
- The local Target store donated \$100 toward sports equipment.
- Arco Arena donated tickets to sporting events.

## Response: Outside Resources

As illustrated, the V Team pulled various outside resources into the River Oaks and New Helvetia communities. Both SHRA and the NPOs believed there was a crucial need for additional social services in the development. SHRA struck a partnership with the county, which provides all of the government financial aid and social services to city and county residents. SHRA provided the county with a row of six apartments, which became the New Helvetia Service Center. The NPOs served on the planning team for the center.

**The center created one-stop shopping** for all services, right in the New Helvetia community. Not only did the center process government checks, but it also offered drug and alcohol counseling, and assistance for the elderly and disabled. Additionally, at the NPOs' urging, the center was staffed with two part-time county probation officers, who could more closely monitor their large juvenile case load in the area.

In many cases, social service providers, law enforcement and housing authorities do not see the same solutions to a given problem. This was an attempt to link these services as one team to improve the area's quality of life. Additionally, the center became an effective place to refer troubled tenants. If the NPOs came across a **problem in a household and** were not able to provide the necessary help or expertise, they referred the family to the center.

## Additional Responses

In 1995, the NPOs began two additional mobilization efforts. The first was a health and education center that would provide activities for adults during the day and for children after school and in the evenings. The center obtained donated weight-lifting equipment and space. The center's activities for children would include classes in martial arts, boxing, street dance, weight lifting and aerobics, as well as computer accessibility. The parents would be able to use the center as well—learning job skills on the computer, taking ex-Oise classes and socializing with their neighbors. At the time that this article was written, the resident councils had taken the lead in establishing the health and education center, and were holding preliminary discussions with SHRA, the Head Start program, the New Helvetia Service Center and the local medical center about using the facility for various activities and services.

Also, the NPOs began discussions with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development about creating businesses to be owned and run by community residents, such as grounds maintenance, garbage removal, a convenience store and

other businesses. This model has been successful in a Washington, D.C., public housing complex, where residents gained a sense of ownership over their community, and used business profits to reinvest in resident employment and college scholarships.

## Assessment

The V Team response acted as a catalyst, putting the officers' mobilization grid into practice. As the NPOs helped mobilize the various ethnic groups participating in the V Team, the children became socialized with children of other races, thus moving horizontally along the grid (horizontal mobilization among children). As the program's success continued, parents slowly became involved in the youth program (vertical mobilization between children and adults). The parents soon found they had something in common with other parents who had children on the V Team, and began interacting with them (horizontal mobilization among adults). The movement of community members freely around the mobilization grid, interacting with others of different ages and nationalities, was the start of a mobilized community.

Additionally, the community recognized the NPOs' work with the children, and the officers began to earn considerable respect among the tenants. This gave them credibility, assisted in communication and led to the perception that the officers were not just in the community to arrest those who lived there.

Positive feedback about the POP effort came from numerous outside sources. For example, Principal Carol Bly of the Jediah Smith Elementary School wrote a letter in which she said the following:

Since you have been assigned to the area...we have seen dramatic changes. Students and parents have commented on the improvement of the neighborhood...The neighborhood is quieter with virtually no loitering. My visits with parents have been very reasonable. They and their children share a sense of hope, and [feel] that others

want to support them in their desire to have a safe community. Best of all, however, is the change I have seen in the children. By this time last year, we had issued approximately 40 suspensions. So far, I have only issued 7. I know this reduction in suspensions is the result of a number of factors [but] we all know that the positive changes in student attitudes are also a reflection of your efforts in the community.

Students who are members of your [V] Team also serve as school leaders. In the past, some of these students had behavioral problems but now work to help other students resolve conflicts...I have even started having students report suspicious activities that I have been able to relay to you and the project managers.

**In April 1994, Sacramento Magazine's survey of 1,000 members of the Sacramento Association of Realtors named the New Helvetia/River Oaks area as the "Most Improved Neighborhood." The magazine article about the survey stated, "In terms of improving the quality of life in a neighborhood, the vote would have to go to the New Helvetia/River Oaks area, located south of Broadway near Miller Park...one of the major factors is the presence of two police officers...who have taken an aggressive stance on crime, while also finding time to work with area youths"**

Perhaps the greatest measure of the program's success was community perceptions. A 1995 door-to-door survey assessed the tenants' relationship with their NPOs and their perceptions about crime. The survey was conducted in November 1995 by a California State University volunteer with assistance from SPD cadets. The survey results indicated that the respondents liked their neighborhood

- 87 percent said they felt safe or somewhat safe.
- 86 percent felt crime had decreased or remained the same.

- 84 percent were satisfied with their NPOs.

At first, the fact that only 51 percent of the respondents said they knew their NPOs and only 30 percent said they talked to their NPOs was disappointing. Evaluation of these responses revealed two factors. First, the NPOs realized that many of the residents were transient—42 percent of the occupants had lived in the community for two years or less and 69 percent had lived there for four years or less. Second, because the NPOs worked swing and graveyard shifts during the two years before the survey, new residents had not had the opportunity to meet them. The NPOs adjusted their schedule after the survey to allow for more daytime contact with residents.

Sixty-three to 71 percent of the responding tenants did not think drug activity, vandalism, car theft, shootings, domestic violence and strangers loitering at night were problems. The remaining 29 to 37 percent who felt these crimes were problems appeared high, given actual crime statistics.

Although the actual crime rate was relatively low, some residents believed crime remained a substantial problem. One reason might have been that the NPOs reported their successes to administrators, not to residents. Although failing to share this information with the community was an obvious oversight in retrospect, it was not apparent until the survey and crime statistics were assessed. The NPOs determined to correct this oversight and report crime statistics to residents, with the goal of increasing community awareness and mobilization.

## Problem Solving Quarterly Submission Guidelines

PERF invites submissions of articles describing successful problem-solving projects. Articles should discuss the four phases of the effort:

1. **Scanning:** What was the problem? How and by whom was it identified?
2. **Analysis:** What methods, data and information sources were used to analyze the problem? **What did the analysis reveal** about the nature and extent of the problem? How was the community involved in **analyzing** the problem?
3. **Response:** What responses were considered? What responses were implemented, and how were they developed as a result of analysis? **What was the goal of the response plan?**
4. **Assessment:** What were the results? How were results evaluated, and for how long? Was the response goal accomplished? Are there any efforts underway to maintain or monitor the long-term results of the project?

**Send submissions to**

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### *Cruising from page 1*

ership. Through the first half of the decade, a number of successful programs were implemented based on the chief's philosophy. Initially, however, no attempt was made to apply the new problem-solving model to the cruising problem, perhaps because the problem was so old. Instead, numerous enforcement-based programs were developed and implemented, none of which resolved the growing crisis.

Sgt. George Kopitch, a patrol sergeant assigned to the affected area, attempted to tackle the problem. He first looked to other cities across the nation for a blueprint of an existing program that would effectively deal with the problem. **Although he found that the problem was not uncommon, no one had yet developed a solution. So** he developed **and** implemented **a plan based** on the chief's community policing philosophy. Kopitch was assisted by Lt Mike Foote (the district commander), Sgt. **Jon** Centanni, Cpl. Mike Stuhl and others.

### **Scanning**

The Santa Ana cruising problem centered on a one-mile stretch of S. Bristol St.—a major four-lane toad that runs through the city's center. Retail centers, food outlets and grocery stores line the street, while residential neighborhoods make up the surrounding area. Some of the homes were particularly affected by cruising because they were located within a dozen feet of Bristol St.

Every Saturday and Sunday night, the normally quiet area fell under the complete control of youths who filled more than 1,000 vehicles to capacity. The vehicles typically contained members of the same sex and age group, whose primary purpose was to meet and socialize with members of the opposite sex. With traffic nearly stopped, the cruisers would initiate verbal contact from car to car, then meet in the commercial parking lots.

As the number of cruisers grew, cruising night began to resemble a large street party. Loud music, which could be easily

heard in the nearby residences, blared from car stereos. Alcohol consumption was common, and the following morning, the area was littered with beer cans and other trash. Revelers who drank too much urinated behind buildings or walls. Meanwhile, Bristol St. was completely gridlocked and virtually impassable. Motorists passing through the city had to endure long delays, while residents were **virtually** cut off from their homes. Police officers complained that an emergency response via Bristol was next to impossible.

Merchants complained that traffic gridlock kept regular customers from their businesses. Many businesses closed early to avoid subjecting their legitimate customers to **intimidation** from the cruisers. Several food establishments **and** one record store welcomed the cruiser business but were concerned for their employees' safety. Most of the businesses that stayed open paid for private security to protect their employees and customers.

**Their fears were justified, as many of the cruisers were gang members. As the evenings progressed, rival gangs began congregating. Competition for turf and status quickly escalated to violence, and homicides and felonious assaults began to occur more frequently.**

In the neighborhoods, residents *complained* of large numbers of *gang members* who would drive through their neighborhoods. Loud music from car stereos kept people awake until the early morning hours. Groups would congregate on sidewalks near homes. Fights often broke out and shots were fired that hit homes and vehicles.

### **Analysis**

As a first step in addressing the problem, Kopitch analyzed cruiser-related calls for service and crime. In 1993, there were 1,200 cruiser-related calls for service, and close to 1,000 calls in 1994. Cruiser-related incidents increased calls for service by up to 200 percent annually in and around the cruising zone. In 1993, there were 181 cruiser-related crimes, including six homicides and 36 felonious assaults.



There were eight more homicides and 130 other incidents in 1994.

Past anti-cruising efforts had consisted of no intervention, small-scale intervention, large multiagency task force enforcement operations, complete street closure, traffic diversions, traffic control points, and a full-time Cruising Enforcement Detail. The Cruising Enforcement Detail was utilized for 11 months and consisted of 20 officers, who were culled from the patrol division. Enforcement action was taken against 4,695 cruisers during that period, with no impact on the overall number of cruisers coming to the city. Although there was a drop in calls for service during this period, it was at a cost of 20 percent of the patrol force. As a result, the rest of the city had reduced police service.

Officers then surveyed the cruisers themselves. The surveys revealed that cruisers came to Santa Ana because of the large crowds who came to cruise. They perceived Santa Ana to be safer than other cities because of the heavy police presence, and believed that the risk of receiving a citation was a small price to pay for cruising. Witnessing violent crimes and watching police responding to incidents provided entertainment for the cruisers.

Another study was conducted to determine the actual number of cruisers. Based on a technique commonly used by ecologists to estimate animal populations, the number of cruisers in Southern California was estimated at 22,330 vehicles (this study counted only vehicles, not passengers, making the likely number of *cruisers* much higher).

Finally, Kopitch found that existing anti-cruising laws were weak and difficult to enforce. The law required the establishment of a traffic control point through which cruisers had to pass three times in four hours. On the second pass, a written warning had to be issued to the driver. The law was easily circumvented.

## Response

The response to the cruising problem focused on the cruisers' motivation. Police

contacts with and observations of cruisers revealed that they saw cruising as an "event," and believed that they "owned" the cruising zone and could do what they wanted. Anonymity in the large crowds promoted uncontrolled behavior. Since the attraction of cruising night was the uncontrolled chaos, the goal of the project was to return control to the authorities. Kopitch observed two areas of weakness that police could take advantage of: 1) the cruisers lacked knowledge of anti-cruising laws, and 2) many of the cruisers were youths driving vehicles beyond their means, which were likely borrowed from parents, relatives or older friends.

## The response took advantage of two of the cruisers' weaknesses: 1) they lacked knowledge of anti-cruising laws, and 2) many of them drove vehicles belonging to parents or others.

First, Kopitch and his team gained community assistance. The retail centers agreed to temporarily restrict access to their parking lots with heavy chains, eliminating the opportunities for loitering. They also provided space for a command post. Community volunteers staffed support positions. The team also sought and obtained permission from local residents to erect temporary barriers at their neighborhoods' entrances. The barriers would restrict cruisers' movement and funnel cars to a new traffic check point.

Second, Kopitch implemented a program in which the police department seized complete control of vehicular movement in the zone. An unprecedented multiagency task force was assembled with officers from nearly every city in the county participating. A control point was established, and a police officer contacted each vehicle moving through the check point and issued an anti-cruising warning that explained the law. The officers identified each driver and made a record of con-

tact, eliminating the anonymity the cruisers once enjoyed. The checks were done in assembly-line fashion, using specially designed computer software to record the needed information quickly.

The difference between this task force and previous efforts was that previous responses focused solely on enforcement. Officers had merely issued citations and impounded vehicles—activities that entertained the other cruisers rather than deterring them. Only those cruisers detained for vehicle code violations were affected. Also, previous efforts had stopped cars randomly, meaning that many cars were never stopped at all.

The new problem-solving effort used task force officers to stop all traffic on Bristol St., and every driver was questioned and identified. This not only eliminated anonymity, but removed the "excitement" factor for cruisers, because everyone was stopped and no one could continue to loiter or cruise while watching the excitement.

Follow-up letters were then sent to the registered owners of each cruising vehicle. The letters advised the owner that the car had been identified as cruising in Santa Ana, which is an illegal activity. The letters were meant to intimidate cruisers who drove their own vehicles, and educate parents whose cars their children had been using. The letters made it clear that cruising was illegal, and that anyone who returned to the area to cruise would be warned and eventually arrested.

For the first three nights of the operation, all traffic in the Bristol cruising zone was filtered through traffic control points, and the chains and barriers were installed. Officers issued anti-cruising warnings to 1,706 cruising vehicles, and the follow-up letters were mailed the following week.

As word spread that the police were cracking down and notifying parents, cruising attendance dropped immediately. Within the first couple of weeks, Kopitch and his team were able to scale back the operation significantly. They reduced,

*Continued on page 10*

## Cruising from page 9

then eliminated the check points, replacing them with car stops. The chains and barriers were also removed at this point. Police continued to issue warnings and obtain identifications, but they had cut out the heart of the problem.

## Assessment

The Cruising Abatement Program eliminated a 20-year-old problem in six weeks. During the six-week period of the operation, only three cruiser-related incidents were recorded. In the three months that followed, there were none. The new environment, which favors normal high-speed traffic over cruising behavior, has helped deter cruisers. Two years have elapsed since the project ended, and the problem has not returned. Violent crime in the area is down sharply and cruiser-related calls for service no longer burden patrol officers. Maintenance operations consist of nightly monitoring for cruisers; a small team is deployed if any cruisers are sighted. Usually, no cruisers appear, and when they do, they are so few that they require minimal police resources.

Bristol St. is once again being used as it was intended as a major traffic artery. Cruiser customers of fast food restaurants and gas stations have been replaced by regular patrons. Several of these businesses, along with three major grocery stores, now have extended hours.

The goal of this problem-solving intervention was to return Bristol St. to the citizens and businesses of Santa Ana. The program was a success because local businesses, residents, neighborhood associations and community groups worked in partnership with the police department. Each made a short-term sacrifice to better the area for everyone in the long run. Through a combination of nontraditional operations, varied enforcement efforts and environmental changes, the problems associated with Bristol St. cruising have been resolved.

# 8th Annual PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING CONFERENCE November 15-18, 1997

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## 1997 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing

PERF is soliciting nominations for its fifth annual Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing. The award recognizes innovative and effective problem-oriented policing projects that have achieved success in reducing specific crime, disorder or public safety problems. The award will be presented at the Eighth Annual International Problem-Oriented Policing Conference in San Diego, Calif., Nov 15-18, 1997. Winners will have the opportunity to present their work to a plenary session of the conference.

This is the premier competition that recognizes exemplary problem-oriented policing projects. The award honors Herman Goldstein, who conceived and developed the theory of problem-oriented policing.

All employees of governmental policing agencies worldwide who directly deliver police services to the public are eligible for the award. Agencies may submit as many nominations as they wish. Submissions must include all four phases of the SARA problem-solving model. Although projects should be current, so long as some portion of the project—even if only ongoing assessment—has occurred within the last year, the entry is eligible.

Submissions must include a nomination letter from the agency chief executive and a project abstract and description, and may include up to 10 pages of supporting documents. The complete package must be submitted by July 25, 1997. For a full description of the award and what information must be included in the project description, contact Jim Burack of the PERF staff at (202) 466-7820 ext. 276 or <Jb-perf@intr.neb.

# Noise Complaints at the Sunset Grille

by Officer Phillip Beahn, St. Petersburg, Fla., Police Department

## Scanning

This problem-oriented policing (POP) project was initiated after a consistent rise in calls for service at the Sunset Grille in St. Petersburg. The calls came from a neighbor reporting loud music and loud patrons. On Friday and Saturday nights, the bar had music in an open area on its west side, usually consisting of one person with a guitar and an amplifier playing between 1900 and 2300 hours. Since 1993, there had been nearly 50 calls for service regarding loud music or patrons. The calls were few in number at first, but in 1995, became more frequent. All of the complaints came from one person—a woman living within 100 feet of the bar. I had met with her often over several years to discuss the problem. She knew the bar was there when she moved in. In fact, the complainant and her husband used to frequent the bar before they moved nearby, and stated that having the bar so close was a deciding factor in their move to the neighborhood. Nevertheless, the neighbor frequently complained about the noise.

## Analysis

To examine the problem of a noise nuisance at the Sunset Grille, I pulled the calls for service at the bar since 1993, as well as the calls for service at the complainant's address during the same period. In 1993 and 1994, the complainant made 11 calls regarding the noise at the bar. For about half the calls, she identified herself and the complaint was listed to her address. After that time, she made almost exclusively "resident refused" complaints on which her identification was not listed. In 1995, there were 19 complaints, and 17 in the first six months of 1996.

Although the complainant did not identify herself in these later calls, I could tell by looking at the notes that they probably came from the same person. I talked to the woman about it, and she admitted to making all of the calls. In some of my conversations with her, she said that other neighborhood residents had complained to her about the music. I decided to canvass the neighborhood. Over several days, I talked to approximately 20 residents. I then reviewed my notes to see if there was any neighborhood consensus about the noise problems.

## A canvass of the neighborhood revealed that the primary complainant was the only person who was bothered by the noise.

I did not find anyone else in the neighborhood who was bothered by the bar. They all said that they knew they lived near a bar, and that they understood that the music and patrons would sometimes be loud. They accepted this because they were aware of the bar when they moved into the area.

To further analyze the problem, I used a dosimeter to check the decibel level of the music. On April 26, 1996, my sergeant, district commander and I went to the complainant's house with the dosimeter. With the instrument on the front porch (about 100 feet from the bar), we ran the dosimeter for the required amount of time during the last set of music. The results showed that the noise level was not even close to violating city noise ordinances. To be in violation, the music had to exceed 75 decibels for half of the testing time. The music on this particular night was above 75 decibels only 3 percent of the time, and not even close to that level the remainder of the time.

## Response

The analysis data confirmed that the problem concerned the single complainant. It also became clear that the bar was not violating city ordinance. Nevertheless, I knew that unless the situation changed, the complainant would continue to call the police. Early in the project, I had suggested that the complainant discuss the problem directly with the bar's owner, but she had never done so. So I asked both people to meet with me, my sergeant and the district commander on June 6, 1996.

The complainant brought a list of "demands," which included lowering the music volume, cutting off the over-drinkers and having patrons keep their voices at a lower level. Instead, the owner offered to reposition the bandstands so the music aims away from the complainant's home. She would also try to keep the musicians playing at a constant volume, and create a buffer of trees and shrubbery between the bar and the complainant's home. Finally, the owner said that on Friday nights, the music would play from 1830 to 2230 hours, and on Saturday nights, from 1800 to 2200 hours, thus ending the music earlier than it had been previously.

## Assessment

This project was meant to address two concerns. First, the high number of repeat calls for service regarding this location was a problem. Second, the complainant's quality of life was a concern. Although she seemed to have exaggerated the problem, it was still clear that it was a real problem from her perspective. Because of the cooperation among the complainant, bar owner and police, the problem was resolved in a way that satisfied everyone. Since the changes were implemented, there has only been one call complaining about noise from the bar.

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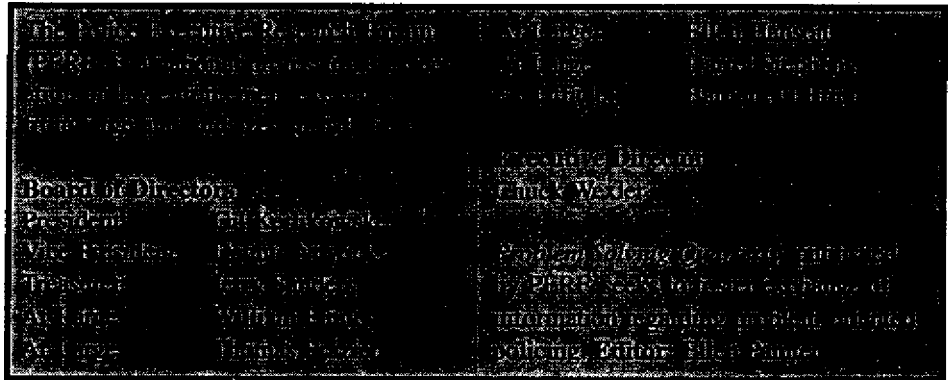
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