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Thefts from Auto, Auto Theft, False Alarms, Intimidation

in September 1993 Ninth District Officer Joe Murphy was assigned to the Grand Avenue foot beat which runs from Laclede to Delmar and Spring to Lee. Joe knew the University Plaza Apartment Building at 607 North Grand as a location with a high number of calls for police service so he decided to work on this problem.

Computer-aided dispatch (C.A.D.) records showed that during the past twenty months, sixty-six calls for service were dispatched to this location, most commonly for larcenies and disturbances.

This fourteen floor apartment building is owned and operated by Kohner Realty Company and the tenants tend to be one of the following three types: St. Louis University students, elderly, and/or recipients of Section 8 housing vouchers.

Joe talked with the on-site property manager, Jane Lorenzen, about her concerns for the tenants and the building. Ms. Lorenzen acknowledged that problems existed, namely - non-residents roaming the building during all hours of the day and night, youths intimidating the elderly residents,

thefts from autos in the parking lot, panhandling in and around the building, and property damage inside the apartment complex.

By attending monthly tenant meetings, Joe also heard the residents* concerns and, in turn, solicited their support. The residents echoed Ms. Lorenzen's concerns. Residents, especially the elderly, felt intimidated by the behavior of the younger non-residents. Panhandling and theft from autos were the next highest priority for the residents.

At the first meeting with the residents, Joe gave out his pager number and asked that they call him directly for non-emergencies that needed police attention. This would help Joe accomplish three things: allow him to gather more information about the incidents that were occurring in and around the apartment building, give Ms. Lorenzen and the tenants a contact whenever they had a question or concern, and occasionally relieve a district car from responding to the apartment complex to take a report of a minor incident. Within a few weeks, Joe began receiving pages most everyday from residents.

Joe looked at the problem of non-residents hanging around the building. The complex was already equipped with a security system that required visitors to ring a specific apartment to gain

entry to the building. However, certain residents were buzzing in anyone who rang their bell for fear of retaliation if they didn't.

To educate the tenants, Ms. Lorenzen started producing a monthly newsletter that offered safety tips including proper use of the security system.

Joe learned that several of the non-residents regularly claimed to be visiting one particular juvenile who lived with his parents in the building. These same juveniles were identified by other residents as being responsible for intimidating behavior, property damage, and false fire alarms.

Joe talked with the parents of the juvenile and advised them of the problem. The parents seemed unwilling to help and the problems with their son continued. Joe started to document all incidents connected with the family. Whenever the juvenile's friends were found on the property, they were either issued summonses for trespassing or field interview reports were completed. The family was also notified of every incident.

One day a resident observed the juvenile break open a fire box in the apartment building, remove the fire extinguisher, and discharge the entire contents of the extinguisher onto the floor, walls, and ceiling. The resident reported this to the building manager who now had sufficient

cause to begin eviction proceedings against the family. Under the lease agreement, tenants can be evicted after three lease violations are documented.

The family protested the eviction and asked for a court hearing. During the hearing the judge reviewed all documentation and listened to the testimony of property managers. The judge upheld the eviction and ordered the family removed. After the family moved out, the building manager rekeyed the building to prevent the juvenile from returning.

Joe was also making progress at reducing the panhandling incidents in the area. He spoke to fellow Ninth District Officer Mike Brown, who had worked on a similar problem in another area of the district. Mike designed an informational flyer to inform citizens how to respond to panhandlers. Copies of the flyer were included in the apartment building's monthly newsletter.

Because panhandling is an area problem, Joe also distributed the flyers to the local businesses and asked that they give them to their employees and customers.

The monthly meetings continued and the residents seemed pleased with the progress thus far. However, some of the residents were still concerned about their safety during the evening and night hours and asked Kohner Realty to hire a security officer to patrol the building during these times. Initially, Kohner believed that additional security was unnecessary. However, based on recommendations from Joe and

Alderwoman Vebna Bailey, who also attended the meetings regularly, Kohner agreed to the recommendation.

Residents also felt that security would be enhanced if the building manager's office was more accessible. The office was located on the second floor, off the beaten path. Kohner agreed to move the office to the first floor, making it more accessible and visible to anyone entering the building.

Joe also looked at the problems of thefts both from and of autos in the parking lot. Theft from autos had risen to twenty, as compared to eleven for the same time frame last year. Auto theft showed similar increases, rising from one incident last year to nine incidents this year during the same time frame.

At the next tenant meeting, it was suggested that a security fence be erected around the parking lot to deter thefts. Again, Kohner Realty initially refused to absorb the cost. Alderwoman Bailey, however, was able to persuade Kohner to comply with the request and the security fence was installed.

Residents were issued a key card that electronically opens the gate to the parking lot. Since the fence was completed in February of this year, there have been no reports of thefts from autos or stolen autos from the rear parking lot.

Joe credits the success of these projects to the cooperation between the police, building owners, building managers, City government, and the residents themselves. Joe specifically praised Alderwoman Bailey for her action and support.

As a result of all this, Joe has dramatically reduced the number of reported larcenies, stolen autos, and destruction of property calls to the apartment building. Joe further measures his success by the reduction in the number of pages he receives from the tenants and managers complaining about problems in the building.

01-31 Escape from Custody

During the past sixteen months Sixth District officers were dispatched to the **Medium Security Institute** at 7600 Hall Street twenty-seven times to make a report for "escaping custody." After reviewing these reports, Sixth District Sergeant William Priest realized that only one incident actually occurred at 7600 Hall Street. The other twenty-six incidents occurred in other districts, but the reports were taken at MSI.

Ms. Laverta Barnes is the Inmate Information Coordinator for MSI and in charge of monitoring the House Arrest program. This program uses electronic shackles to monitor inmates' movement, registering when he/she leaves the home. When a prisoner is suspected of violating the conditions of house arrest, Ms. Barnes dispatches MSI correctional officers to investigate. If the correctional officers are unable to locate the inmate, they return to 7600 Hall Street and summon the police.

This procedure creates a burden for the Area ID staff. Not only were two Sixth District officers and a sergeant dispatched to each of the above calls, Area **in** detectives were responsible for follow-up investi-

gations on each incident regardless of the location of occurrence.

Sergeant Priest spoke to **Chief Warrant Officer Steven Ohmer** for legal clarification on the elements of "escaping custody." Mr. Ohmer was of the opinion that the crime occurs at the location to which the prisoner was confined.

When Sergeant Priest re-contacted Ms. Barnes and explained his findings, she was willing to modify MSI policy. Sergeant Priest suggested that MSI officers remain at the location of the incident and that the Police Department send officers from the district of occurrence to take the report. Ms. Barnes agreed to change the policy.

While these changes are not likely to affect the incidence of escaping custody, they make the procedure more efficient for MSI officers and more equitably distribute the workload among police districts. During a recent meeting, the Deputy Chiefs and Chief of Police commended Sergeant Priest's work and expressed an interest in further reducing police involvement in the reporting process.

Litter, Cuttings (Accidental), Property Damage (Vehicles)

In the spring of 1993, police officers from the **Mobile Reserve** Unit attended neighborhood meetings organized by the St. Louis Association of Community **Organizations** (SLACO) at which chronic complaints about men drinking beer on corners and vacant lots and causing disturbances.

Lieutenant Joe Richardson discovered that most citizens were more concerned about the broken beer bottles and litter left behind than they were about the drinking itself. Some of the more popular drinking spots have as much as a foot of broken glass.

Bottles, still in paper sacks, are often discarded in the street where they are run over by unsuspecting motorists. Parents complained about cuts to their children's feet from the broken glass. The problem is not confined to one neighborhood. Hundreds of lots, alleys, and streets in St. Louis are similarly affected.

SLACO and officers of the Mobile Reserve (including **Gary Hill, Michael O'Hare, Terry Sloan, and Simon Risk**) decided to create a task force to address this problem. The city's Excise Commissioner, **Robert Kraiberg**, also joined.

Members of the task force met with local beer distributors (separately, to avoid federal anti-trust violations) to learn their perspective. They discovered that because Missouri law prohibited the sale of beer in any container smaller than 32 ounces, distributors marketed the 40 ounce bottle as a single serving.

The distributors and many retailers claimed that sales were not that profitable because of discounted prices, the inconvenience of stocking the bottles, and glass breakage. Consumers complained because the volume exceeded what many wished to consume at one time or could be kept cold.

The Task Force proposed several alternative packaging

ideas to the distributors. They even explored the feasibility of a bottle deposit law. None of these proposals met with favor among the distributors who, a couple of years ago, beat back a proposal to ban 40 ounce bottles by city ordinance.

The distributors did, however, express an interest in marketing a large aluminum can if the state and city laws could be changed. They would discontinue the discounts on 40 ounce bottles and promote the cans.

Aldermen Kenneth Jones and Mark Clark sponsored the city ordinance permitting the sale of single cans of beer 16 ounces and greater. Lieutenant Richardson testified in support of the ordinance which passed on March 18th. The task force lobbied the state liquor commissioner in favor of a rule change that would permit local option. With wide support, including that of **Chief Harmon**, a modified state rule is expected to take effect June 6th.

Operation Brightside has been assured adequate funding to undertake a large clean-up effort across the city. The Mobile Reserve Unit will monitor the impact of this project in those neighborhoods where the problem is the worst.

While these changes are unlikely to affect the level of drinking on the street, the associated problems of litter, accidental injury and property damage, and potentially even intentional injury may very well be alleviated.

0^B **Tri** DOWN THE ROAD

On the off chance that the department's rumor mill is not grinding as finely as usual, I confirm that I am leaving the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department. **Captain Roy** Joachimstaler is taking over as the new Special Assistant to the Chief of Police to continue the implementation of community-oriented problem solving. Officer **Bob Heimberger** will continue as his assistant.

I have taken a job as the Chief of Police of the **Lauderhill, Florida Police Department** in Broward County. That community recently decided to re-create their own municipal police department after fifteen years of contracted service. The leaders of Lauderhill specified that they want to build a police department that fully adopts a problem-oriented approach to policing. My challenge is to hire eighty people who share that philosophy of police service and to create a structure, a set of policies, and a leadership style that support this kind of police work.

My time here with the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department was always intended to be limited. My job was merely to introduce the concept of community-oriented problem solving and give its implementation enough of a push to get it going. I believe that has been accomplished.

Keys to the City is a regular publication of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department designed to share examples of good police-community problem solving in the City of St. Louis. Project descriptions should be sent to the COPS Coordinator's Office in Room 607 of Headquarters by departmental or electronic mail. Inquiries can also be directed to 444-5681.

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Address correction requested

The real credit for the successes we enjoyed over the past few years goes to the police officers, supervisors, commanders, and civilian support staff who took the opportunity try these ideas. They have shown this community a better method of policing and they have blazed a trail for other police officers to follow. I am sincerely grateful to those risk-takers in our department and privileged to have had the chance to watch them work. We should all be grateful for the support of certain citizens in our community who themselves have been willing to rethink their role in policing the city and who have patiently worked with us to bring about positive change.

I would like to publicly express my gratitude to **Chief Clarence Harmon** for the opportunity to experiment on his watch. He has done many good things for this department and this city long before they became safe to do. And finally, I would like to thank our former Police Board President, **David Robbins**, for having the vision and the determination to see that the process of change got started, knowing that none of us would be around long enough to see the work finished. My best wishes to Roy Joachimstaler, Bob Heimberger, and the rest of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department.

Mike Scott

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