

Community Policing

COMMUNITY POLICING

The 1995/96 Ventura County Grand Jury visited Police Department and other Law Enforcement agencies with storefronts in operation, seeking a better understanding of community policing.

BACKGROUND

Community policing is a world wide concept that can be viewed as a cafeteria from which individual police departments can draw to tailor community policing to a particular city. It encourages interaction and builds trust between officers and citizens of the community.

It is believed that crime can be largely attributed to population density, age of residents and number of youthful residents as well as poverty are a major factor in crime.

There is a need for a continuous police presence in the neighborhood. Storefronts encourage the residents to adopt the officers and the storefront as their own. Store front sites are an attempt to establish a partnership between the residents and the police in solving neighborhood problems. In the community policing concept neighborhood needs and wants must be considered in order to get the community to buy into it.

There is a commitment to the concept of community policing and leadership by Police Chiefs and officers in the establishment of storefronts.

Another concept of community policing is geographic team policing favored by Ventura Police Department, which would give officers an opportunity to interact with residents of a given area of the city working together with neighborhood watch committees. In Ventura there are approximately 10,000 members of neighborhood watch committees.

Storefront stations are staffed by experienced, trained, dedicated officers who possess special skills which include desire and sensitivity, these officers are assigned on a volunteer basis and continue on the same career path as other officers.

Often Code Enforcement working together with storefront officers and volunteers, play an important roll in improving many areas. Neighborhoods tend to deteriorate due to over crowding when, former resident owners move to other areas, and become absentee landlords.

COOPER ROAD (LA COLONIA) OXNARD

This office is well kept, staffed by two uniformed officers assisted by neighborhood volunteers. These volunteers play a vital roll by answering phones and taking reports allowing officers more time to make visits to local merchants and residents building trust and a working relationship. The facility and equipment have been donated by local merchants and residents. This office is well supplied and the citizens have come to accept it as their own. In addition to motor patrol and walking patrol there is also a bicycle patrol. There has been some success in problem solving in the neighborhood through cooperation among the storefront officers, merchants and residents.

A Problem for this storefront is a lack of a sufficient number of volunteers.

HUENEME ROAD (SOUTHWINDS) OXNARD

This storefront is larger than Cooper Road facility. It has a counter across the front preventing direct contact with the officers assigned to the station. It is located near the Naval Construction Battalion Center with good relations between the two agencies. This facility works with probation officers to reduce area problems of drugs, prostitution and loitering. There are a number bars, liquor stores and motels in the area. Code enforcement has proved extremely helpful by working with station officers to encourage cooperation from property owners to reduce illegal activities by tenants and their guests.

A Problem for this storefront is the lack of volunteers from the neighborhood.

WESTSIDE STOREFRONT VENTURA

In Ventura as in Oxnard the Westside Storefront is under the supervision of a very able dedicated officer who also speaks Spanish. It is located in a large donated facility. There is a counter in a large comfortable ante room separating a large rear working area.

The Westside community council members who staff the station make up the long list of volunteers. This is a great asset not found at other sites visited. The Chief, Assistant Chief and the Storefront Commander point to the transformation of Ramona Street in Ventura as one of its success stories.

This facility has the support of the residents, westside neighborhood and business community.

VENTURA HARBOR STOREFRONT

This is an attractive and spacious office. It operates as an information center as well as a police facility. Since the Ventura Harbor Districts' patrol personnel are not sworn officers, assistance in law enforcement is provided by the sworn officers staffing the storefront. Officers patrol the harbor area on foot and bicycles.

RESOURCE CENTERS

Resource Centers exist in cities which contract with Sheriff's Department for police coverage. Community Resource Centers differ from storefront police offices in that they are not staffed by a sworn officer. These centers however provide access to deputies, for interviews and meetings with victims. They serve the sheriff deputies as an in field location where reports can be written and citations signed off. Resource centers are staffed by volunteers drawn from the community at large. They may work as few as six hours per month. Services obtained at Community Resource Centers include:

- How to obtain restraining orders.
- How to use code enforcement and animal control.
- How to handle unresolved complaints.
- Referrals to the Victim/Witness Assistance Unit.
- Information about Simi and Ventura Municipal Courts.
- Fingerprinting for a fee of five dollars.

A citizen may receive information about Crime Prevention programs, neighborhood watch, home security, vacation security, business watch, personal safety, senior safety and crime stoppers. The

centers offer a non threatening confidential atmosphere where a citizen can seek the help of a deputy in preference to having the sheriff come to their home.

THOUSAND OAKS RESOURCE CENTER

The Thousand Oaks Resource Center is a small attractive office, in a donated facility on Lombard Street, in a largely commercial area near busy Thousand Oaks Boulevard. The Center consist of a reception room divided by a counter from which volunteers conduct center business. A rear door leads to a large room which is divided into cubicles, where deputies can conduct interviews. There is usually only one volunteer on duty. This center has no shortage of volunteers.

MOORPARK RESOURCE CENTER

The Moorpark Resource Center occupies a large facility just off a busy shopping center. Formerly this was a doctor's office, which has been renovated, equipped and donated to the city. Visitors enter a large waiting room attractively furnished. There is a glassed reception counter staffed by uniformed center volunteers. Toys have been placed in one corner to keep children occupied while business is conducted. Five other rooms completed the facility. Some volunteers are certified EMT (Emergency Medical Team) trained, and several deputies are preparing for certification. Sheriff deputies are considering the use of the center as an alternate site to bring children who have been removed from their homes, rather than the sheriff station. A bicycle patrol also operates from this center. The staff is dedicated, enthusiastic and proud of the facility and the work they are doing in their community. There are no shortage of volunteers.

COMMENDATION

The 1995/96 Grand Jury commends the Police and Sheriff's Department personnel for establishing storefront and resource centers and for their continued commitment to the concept of community policing.