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Keeping residents involved is key to fighting crime in Lafayette

By Pippa Fisher



The most recent Citizen's Police Academy graduates. Photo Pippa Fisher

Morgan said that of the 15 residential burglaries so far this year, 13 arrests have been made or arrest warrants have been issued. He pointed out that, compared to the national average of a 13 percent solve rate, this was a "phenomenal" achievement. Morgan credits the hard work of Christensen and drew attention to the hours Surges-Moscato spent single-handedly reviewing the cameras, helping to identify suspects.

He credits the street cameras, too, for these statistics and gave as an example of the cameras' success the apprehension of a suspect in connection with a series of recent car fires set by a serial arsonist in local towns, including one in Lafayette. The suspect was identified on one of the cameras within 10 hours of the fire set in Lafayette. He also credited the hard work of the police and Contra Costa Fire Protection District.

Morgan described the commission's "camera loaner" program as an example of their layering approach and said that of the residents who take advantage of a chance to borrow and try out cameras, 95 percent go on to purchase them.

Morgan explained the two-fold mission of the CPC is to advise on policies to be enacted in the city, and to educate the public and encourage engagement between residents and police.

Morgan listed several public forums as examples of engagement between police and community - a Fraud and Identity Theft forum in December, a recent Internet Safety for Parents and Children held at Lafayette Elementary School and an Implicit Bias and Procedural Justice workshop attended voluntarily by virtually the entire police department in uniform. It also gives various ad hoc presentations in different neighborhoods. He said the commission hopes to bring more workshops to the city and schools soon.

Following last year's "Don't Feed the Bears" campaign, with artwork designed by Acalanes High School students, that encouraged the public to lock its cars, the city saw a 54 percent decrease in auto burglaries. Morgan explained that their new campaign, "Lock up Lafayette" will be starting soon, with leaflets and door-hangers in neighborhoods, reminding people to lock their doors and windows.

As a further example of public engagement, Morgan gave praise to the "untold hours" of work put into the Citizen's Police Academy by CPC members Denise Brown and Judie Peterson.

The free, six-week program gives residents a chance to engage in the day-to-day life of the police. Participants get to drive a police car, learn about gun safety, shoot a firearm and go on a tour of the jail among many other experiences.

Morgan explained the program, now in its third year, has graduated more than 100 participants, the most recent group having graduated minutes earlier at the same city council meeting.

Lafayette resident and a recent Citizen's Police Academy graduate Rob Sturm described the content of the course as "stellar" and "riveting."

Christensen says the police enjoy the experience of having the citizens with them and look forward to participating. The next session will begin in September.

Lafayette's crime continues to decrease, thanks to a combination of factors, including cameras and the extensive outreach to the public from the police department. That outreach is led by the "Dynamic Duo" - Police Chief Eric Christensen and Police Records Supervisor Cathy Surges-Moscato.

So said Rees Morgan, chair of the Crime Prevention Commission, in a report to the city council on June 12.

Morgan said that since the implementation of cameras on city streets in 2013, there has been an overall downward trend in residential burglaries, from 61 in 2013 to 31 in 2016, with 2015 having only 22.

"Is it all due to the cameras?" he said. "Probably not entirely, but it's a trend we like."

More impressive perhaps is the solve rate of 86 percent.

The Citizen's Police Academy is yet another example of ways in which the CPC's goal of having the "most informed community about crime prevention and public safety issues" is being realized.

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