

# **2023 Herman Goldstein Award Application: Addressing The Organized Retail Crime Problem**

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## One Solution To Addressing The Organized Retail Crime Problem

### **Summary:**

Over the past 11 years, the Redlands Police Department has undergone challenges regarding staffing, funding, and dealing with the effects of an increase in crime. Organized Retail Crime rates have grown causing widespread problems for not only the police department but the businesses and the customers they serve. In an effort to address the problem of organized retail crime, RPD has adopted strategies they have been using to address other types of crime trends by marrying some of their most productive technologies and tools, such as 3SI Security GPS Trackers and Flock Safety automated license plate reader cameras, in a manner that allows the department to track trends and thus understand ORC like never before. Based on the history of other police departments replicating RPD's technological efforts, it is anticipated that other police departments across the nation will duplicate RPD's efforts to address ORC in the same manner.

### **Description:**

#### *Scanning*

Redlands, California is a small college town located one hour east of Los Angeles. One of the main challenges that the Redlands Police Department faced in 2011 was they could not financially afford to maintain their current number of sworn officers. When the department had to reduce their sworn officer count from 92 to 71, the RPD noticed a significant rise in crime rates in the area. Roughly five to six burglaries were being reported each week and it was very possible that these increases were directly related to the decrease in officers. The challenges they faced involved developing affordable and effective solutions to combat and reduce the rising instances of burglary and theft within the community. Community policing officers began researching options that would focus on solving the biggest problem in Redlands at the time, car burglaries. Typically, RPD would conduct a stakeout of potentially targeted areas but, with the lack of funding, stakeouts were no longer affordable. This is when the RPD began researching specialized GPS technology that banks were utilizing to protect their assets. If the banks could adopt this type of an asset protection strategy, why couldn't RPD for the

businesses in their respective jurisdiction? So, the department began working with 3SI Security Systems to implement remote GPS electronic stakeout devices.

Originally, the nature of the problem was based on funding and staffing shortages. After analyzing how banks understand and adapt to crime tracking and prevention, RPD reached out to 3SI Security, to learn about their remote GPS tracking. The department began implementing GPS technology in a variety of ways to address community and businesses crime. After several years of success and while presenting the concept at the International Association Chiefs of Police Tech Conference in Jacksonville, Florida, RPD discovered Flock Safety ALPR Cameras. While the cameras were originally designed for homeowner associations, in partnership with the community, RPD installed them in neighborhoods around the city where crime has been occurring in an effort to develop leads to those crimes.

### *Analysis*

The deputy chief for RPD reports, "Before the introduction of these new technologies, the reduction of officers on the job had RPD feeling defeated as if they were just signing off reports rather than taking steps to solve the crime." The major problem at the time was budget, and back in early 2011 in the Redlands area, property crime was already on the rise. When RPD was first deciding to implement GPS tracking technology, they wanted to focus on how GPS technology could put them in direct contact with suspects soon after they commit their crime. "These tools acted as force multipliers where they could have multiple surveillances different hot spots around the city at a fraction of the cost, 24 hours a day, seven days a week." The trackers were not only very small and affordable, costing only \$565 to purchase with \$30 a month cell service fee per device, but they could be monitored and modified via the internet. At any point in time an officer can adjust the GPS trackers update rate, or even the sensitivity in which they activate, which requires a designated amount of constant movement. Additionally, the benefit and safety of these devices added community value. Property crime makes people feel victimized and targeted and instills a fear of being re-victimized.

Though most property crime is committed for monetary gain or transactional purposes, these asset protection tools have allowed the, "hunted to become the hunters" with tools like "While

You're Away Program". Everyone has that fear of going away and returning to a burglarized home. RPD is trying to alleviate that fear. Residents can contact the RPD to apply for a motion sensitive tracking device to place on a valuable item in their home. There is an application process, and each participant may only be loaned one device at a time. This program provides residents with a way to monitor their home and protect their assets. Community members have round-the-clock surveillance that immediately informs the RPD of any movement. These benefits, coupled with the fact that the devices provide 24/7 surveillance at a cost of only \$2.53 per day for the first year and \$.88 per day every year after, make these trackers a key component for alleviating the fear vacationers may have.

RPD was the first police department to utilize Flock Safety cameras west of the Mississippi. Flock Safety is an Atlanta based, consumer company that has found clients for its ALPR cameras across 30 states. With these cameras, users can track every vehicle that passes through their neighborhood. If a burglar strikes, they can check to see which cars were spotted in the areas around the time of the crime and pass that footage onto police. The cameras main point of controversy is privacy, with data collection of innocent citizens driving their vehicles being considered by some as government intruding on the privacy of citizens. In order to alleviate privacy concerns, strict parameters are put into place as to who can view the footage, and the data automatically deletes after 30 days.

Organized Retail Crime (ORC) is not new for businesses, costing retailers on average \$720,000 for every \$1 billion in sales as of 2020 where sixty-nine percent of retailers surveyed in 2021 reported an increase in ORC activity in the past year. What the Redlands Police Department has noticed with many retailers is they have generally relaxed loss prevention policies in place in order to protect their employees and it is plainly evident that the public is becoming aware of this. In many cases, businesses have policies that prohibit anybody from the store from actively trying to dissuade shoplifters from taking merchandise. The RPD recognizes this challenge and is working with local businesses in high-target shopping centers to analyze trending product theft and project the stores or shopping centers that will be targeted next in hopes that police can come up with a strategy that will enable them to be put in direct contact with the thieves instead of store employees.

A prime example of this took place between December 2021 and January 2022. A Kohl's, located in Redlands was a victim of an organized retail crime crew in which five subjects entered the store and stole \$10,000 worth of high-end fragrances before fleeing in a silver Mercedes. The escape was caught on a Flock camera that was set up around the shopping center. Later that month , an Ulta located in the same shopping center also fell victim to the same crew who this time stole \$12,000 worth of high-end fragrances. Thanks again to the Flock cameras, officers were able to identify the same vehicle fleeing the scene of the crime. Unique body damage on the Mercedes could be seen in both incident reports. After meeting with asset protection specialists from Ulta, RPD was informed that the company would be deploying their own trackers in multiple area locations including Redlands.

Over the span of the next month, several other retail stores were hit in similar circumstances and

thanks to the aforementioned strategies, officers and asset protection specialists from the businesses were able to eventually apprehend the leader of the group and six other individuals shortly after they committed similar crimes in Perris and Jurupa, California.

*Response:*

To address Organized Retail Crime (ORC), RPD has gone the extra mile by collaborating with local shopping centers and individual retailers to install both GPS Trackers and Flock Safety ALPR cameras in and around their businesses. As a result of this process, RPD has been able to make apprehensions involving an organized retail theft crew that was targeting stores in the area that sell high end fragrance and cologne. Based on the number of organized retail theft crimes that were committed by this crew prior to apprehension, there is no doubt that if this crew had not been caught, they would have continued to commit crimes in the region. This same strategy has been replicated by other police departments across the country.

*Assessment: A New Form of Policing Emerges*

The first investigation that tested these trackers evolved around a vehicle burglary problem at the local LA Fitness parking lot. With something as simple as a bait laptop placed in a car parked

outside the gym, officers received an alert of movement from the GPS device within hours of placement and were able to apprehend the individuals responsible for the vehicle burglary. The suspects were literally caught in the act. Furthermore, detectives were able to clear 12 additional vehicle burglaries the two suspects had also committed. These applications of bait and catch have since been used to address problems including armed robbery, commercial burglary, wire theft, metal theft, construction site theft, truck tire theft, fire hydrant theft, and more. RPD has even utilized 3SI's technology to arrest credit card skimming suspects and protect residences of homeowners who are on vacation. Basically, whenever a crime trend emerges, RPD evaluates whether an electronic stakeout could address the issue.

RPD has also adopted the use of automated license plate reader technology in its effort to address organized retail crime in business complexes. This type of technology has enabled RPD to not only generate leads to ORC that have occurred at these complexes but to other types of crime as well including robbery (both retail and street), theft, and vandalism. Often, officers are able to obtain a description of the suspect's getaway vehicle either from firsthand witnesses or surveillance camera footage. Law enforcement is then able to compare those images against vehicles caught on the Flock Safety ALPRs to develop leads to who the car getaway car belongs to. Flock Safety only retains the images for 30 days and strict parameters are set in place as to who can search the database thereby addressing the privacy concerns that typically surround the use of automated license plate reader technology.

The deputy chief for RPD reports, "Before the introduction of these new technologies, the reduction of officers on the job had RPD feeling defeated as if they were just signing off reports rather than taking steps to solve the crime." The major problem at the time was budget, and back in early 2011 in the Redlands area, property crime was already on the rise. When RPD was first deciding to implement GPS tracking technology, they wanted to focus on how GPS technology could put them in direct contact with suspects soon after they commit their crime. "These tools acted as force multipliers where they could have multiple surveillances different hot spots around the city at a fraction of the cost, 24 hours a day, seven days a week." The trackers were not only very small and affordable, costing only \$565 to purchase with \$30 a month cell service fee per device, but they could be monitored and modified via the internet.

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Over the span of the next month, several other retail stores were hit in similar circumstances and thanks to the aforementioned strategies, officers and asset protection specialists from the businesses were able to eventually apprehend the leader of the group and six other individuals shortly after they committed similar crimes in Perris and Jurupa, California.

Redlands Deputy Chief Travis Martinez explains, "During the brainstorming process of how to tackle the bigger picture of ORC, we truly had no other options that would fit within our budget constraints. The thought did arise of advocating to these affected businesses to hire more asset protection or Loss prevention staff, but many were not in a position to afford such a high expense. Something RPD staff noticed initially when working with 3SI and the GPS systems was that the criminals were rarely on foot when arriving at the target location. License plate verification was thus a valuable tool when trying to identify the perpetrators. Flock Safety



allowed RPD to track and monitor targeted areas by analyzing vehicle relationships to the crimes being reported and to link them to unresolved incidents.

The RPD's goal by combining these 3SI's GPS trackers and Flock Safety's ALPR cameras were to specifically target ORC. The RPD believes that if they are going to participate in this problem, then it is their duty to hold perpetrators accountable by utilizing the resources within their possession to return stolen property, deter future offenders, and if possible influence other police departments to raise the baseline from which they all operate by implementing these features into their systems where applicable. Even now there have been Flock cameras placed throughout local shopping centers and high target retail stores where these centers have GPS trackers in place, such as Tilly's, ULTA, and Sephora, etc., on some of their higher theft products.

A prime example of spreading this wealth of knowledge comes from Cobb County Police Department in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2019 Cobb County PD launched a pilot project by placing 13 Flock Safety ALPR's near a Six Flags, where over the past five years they have averaged 147 thefts from vehicles from March to August 3. RPD hopes to see community growth in overall and psychological safety, and to ensure that the techniques and technologies that they have used are available while the cost-to-benefit is well understood across the country. Not only do communities benefit, but the police department's advantage increases over criminals in their respective areas, reducing and one day rectifying rising organized crime groups.

The primary person directing adoption of these technologies is Redlands Deputy Chief of Police Travis Martinez, a small group of officers, and a crime analyst. There were no real obstacles to implementing these new technologies, though pushback was observed during the initial implementation phase. To this day there has been no secondary resolution, had these technologies and strategies fallen short. When it came to the initial issues of budget and layoffs, the RPD had very few feasible options in terms of financing and departmental approval. Luckily though the community had an overwhelming positive response to the new tools and has taken quite well to these new strategies.

Community support is captured by the constant donation of bait items donated to the RPD to conduct investigations and the positive responses to their "While You're Away" program. The RPD hopes to see more funding for this technology nationally, perhaps in the form of government grants. No longer do officers have to pull over or stop people because they "match" the description of the suspects. Now, the GPS technology directs officers to within inches of where the device is located.

## Appendices

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**Loraine Burger**

Perspectives on Policing

## RISE Award nominee: Calif. PD gains community support with crime-curbing innovations

When manpower was down and crime was up, Redlands PD found a solution that did more than catch criminals

Apr 7, 2015

**TASER**  
**RISE**  
A W A R D S

OUR RISE WINNERS HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED!  
CLICK HERE TO READ MORE

A banner for the TASER RISE Awards. On the left, the TASER logo (a lightning bolt in a circle) is above the word "TASER". Below that, the word "RISE" is written in large, bold, block letters, and "A W A R D S" is written in smaller letters underneath. The background of the banner is a black and white photograph of a police officer in uniform embracing a woman. On the right side of the banner, there is a dark, downward-pointing arrow shape containing the text "OUR RISE WINNERS HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED!" and "CLICK HERE TO READ MORE" in white, bold, uppercase letters.

**Editor's Note:** The TASER RISE Awards have officially commenced. In the second-ever edition of the RISE Award Program, TASER and Police1 again honored officers, agencies, and community partners who have risen above the rest. Redlands Police Department is a shining example of what an Agency of the Year nominee truly should be. Stay tuned to find out who our winners are!

In 2011, Redlands (Calif.) Police Department underwent fiscal challenges that reduced their sworn officer count from 92 to 71, which subsequently increased their crime rates. 5 to 6 burglaries were being reported a week, and the traditional solution — conducting a police stakeout — was no longer a viable option. (A single four-man surveillance operation could cost \$1,200).

Community policing officers determined to find an affordable solution began researching options to solve the town's burglary problem. That's when they came across a specialized GPS tracking device, and approached both community members and local businesses to develop a game plan for deployment.

### **A Shocking Trial Run**

One of Redlands' biggest problems was car burglaries. So to test out their new device, officers attached the GPS to a laptop and left it sitting visibly inside a vehicle in a gym parking lot known for criminal activity.

After just 45 minutes, officers and dispatchers were notified that the device was activated and in motion. Their first thought was that something went wrong — they'd deployed it incorrectly somehow. But as it moved 50 mph down the freeway, police realized it had worked exactly as they'd hoped — and faster.

Redlands police arrested the suspect in a gas station parking lot and found stolen items in the vehicle's back seat.

As the device continued to prove successful, the officers had another thought: why not use this for other common thefts, like bikes and oxy?

### **Mounting Success Stories**

After applying their new strategy across many local problem areas, an influx of success stories started pouring in, assuring the department that they'd made the right choice, and the community that their department was really onto something. Here are just some of their accomplishments:

- Mothers of Lost Children — a group devoted to memorializing children's grave sites — approached the department after experiencing multiple graveyard thefts. After catching the culprits, thanks to a GPS device sewed into one of the stolen items, police recovered over 100 other stolen items from the cemetery.
- After several residential burglaries occurred, police were given permission by a homeowner to deploy a high-end chop saw at a home, complete with a tracking device. Police were able to apprehend two suspects and later found over \$95K worth of stolen property at the suspects' homes.
- Police were informed that burglars responsible for several takeover robberies had recently been threatening convenience store clerks, wearing masks and toting guns. When robbing a service station in Redlands, they stole a money pack with a GPS device inside. After a lengthy pursuit, both suspects were arrested and eventually charged with multiple burglaries that occurred that month.

Redlands police were able to stop bike thefts, credit card skimming scams, vending machine thefts, and even home-delivery package thefts thanks to the innovative technology and the officers' unwavering commitment to drive down crime.

Special Operations and Investigations Lt. Travis Martinez, who played a lead role in seeking out and deploying the technology, compiled a report to illustrate how effective the program had become in its first three years – not just at targeting theft, but at capturing career criminals.

His report found that 77 of the adults arrested as a result of the GPS device had been arrested a total of 1,262 times, and 19 of them had warrants for their arrest.

To date, the program is responsible for 152 arrests.

Vehicle burglary in Redlands dropped 18.4 percent from 2010 to 2012, while the national property crime rate rose 11 percent from 2010 to 2011.

### **A Community Builder**

"The key is community collaboration," said Martinez. "Virtually every deployment necessitates some form of community interaction."

The department utilizes social media to keep their community aware of the successful work they're doing.

"We share with our community because they're our partners in this; we get our information from " said Martinez.

Lt. Martinez said the laptops and other equipment they use as bait are donated to the department by community members wanting to help. They can even go to the department to pick up equipment and a tracker, attach it themselves, and let police and dispatchers do the rest.

"The community just wants someone to spearhead the charge," said Martinez. "They're willing to provide the tools. You just need to let them know what resources you have."

One of the most recent programs to surface as a result of the tracking program is While You're Away, a surveillance program the department offers to give community members peace of mind when they leave for vacation.

The GPS tracking program has strengthened ties with the Redlands community, reinforced police legitimacy, and created strong relationships with other police agencies. Spokesmen from Redlands PD have presented the program at national, international, and state conferences so that departments nationwide can follow in their footsteps.

Redlands police keep asking the question 'what more can we do?' and they keep finding new answers. In 2014 alone they arrested 64 career criminals, gave their community peace of mind, and shared their knowledge with agencies everywhere. It's for these reasons that Redlands Police are nominees of TASER's 2015 RISE Awards for Agency of the Year.

## About the author

Loraine Burger writes and edits news articles, product articles, columns, and case studies about public safety, community relations, and law enforcement for Police1. Loraine has developed relationships with law enforcement officers nationwide at agencies large and small to better understand the issues affecting police, whether on the street, at the office or at home.

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