



NOMINATION FOR THE  
HERMAN GOLSTEIN  
EXCELLENCE IN PROBLEM  
SOLVING AWARD

COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM  
EAST PATROL DIVISION  
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI POLICE DEPARTMENT

A major source of policing efforts was being concentrated in a four square block area on the east side of Kansas City, Missouri. It is known as the Santa Fe Neighborhood. The center of this area is the intersection of 27th Street and Benton Boulevard. The four corners of this area are occupied by a drug store, a liquor store and several apartment buildings. This is also a major bus route for the city. Near the bus stops are several pay telephones and benches. With this combination, the area lent itself well to drug activity and loitering, resulting in a high volume of calls for service. Adding to the problems were the uninterested business owners and the absentee management of the various apartment buildings. The area was experiencing urban flight and the neighbors that were left did not have the unity nor the force to combat the problem alone. A holistic approach to the problem was the only way to address it. A zero tolerance approach to the drug activity and an environmental change (moving bus stops, cutting back bushes, turning off pay telephones) were employed together to address the problems. The results have been a better standard of living and a measurable decrease in crime and calls for service.

The problem was multi-faceted, comprised of drug dealers dealing not only in the apartments, but also from houses and in front of the liquor store and drug store. They also used the pay phones and bus stops to conduct their business. Dealers would stand for hours on the sidewalks in front of the apartments because of the high foliage and "good concealment. When the police would approach they would run into the apartment buildings and lock the doors behind them. The apartments have unrestricted "street parking enabling the dealers' customers to pull up and purchase their drugs

easily and quickly.

To compound the problem, the lighting in the area was poor and the streets were littered with trash and discarded household items. These facts fostered the growing uncaring atmosphere that was causing the area to decline.

The liquor control for the city was not able to handle the great demand for them, so the liquor store was going basically unmonitored. The liquor store signed trespass letters allowing the officers to arrest anyone loitering in the parking lot. This began to get rid of some of the loiterers in the area. However, the liquor store began to sell barbecued chicken in the parking lot from an open grill. This caused the same people that were being arrested for trespassing in the lot to now have a reason to be in the parking lot. They would wait for their chicken, and then would spend hours eating it and loitering.

The area became a dangerous place for the police to drive through or even park their cars because they would get rocks thrown at them. The officers were having to have two officers respond on calls while one officer sat and watched the parked patrol cars. Needless to say, this caused a great deal of black out time for the officers.

The residents were very reluctant to share any information with the police for fear of retaliation from the drug dealers.

The area was a problem for the police, not only in calls for service and a great deal of committed time, but also in that it became a severe officer safety consideration to continue to enter

the area in the same manner that they had in the past.

The innocent passer-bys who became the targets of the drug dealers and drug users to rob and steal their cars as they drove or walked through the area.

The residents of the neighborhood who were afraid to come out of their houses or talk to the police about their concerns.

The business owners in the area that are adversely affected by the loitering and drug activity in front of their stores, (dry cleaners, grocery store).

The city tax payers, for all of the revenue that is spent on police and social services in the area for programs that have not led to a permanent solution to the deterioration of the neighborhood.

The police were affected because of the time and effort lost at trying to control the problem. This only became worse, to the point of putting the officers at risk when simply driving into the area.

The passer-bys were forced to find other routes around the area to avoid the stop lights at 27th and Benton.

The residents of the area that had to change their daily routine in order to get along with the drug dealers so that they would not harm them.

The drug and alcohol abusers now have a haven to use these substances and obtain more in a very convenient manner. This only adds to their problems and gives them no incentive to quit.

The residents of the area were also affected by the rise in burglaries, violent acts, and drug activity. These activities drove the real estate values down and the insurance premiums up.

The merchants in the area were forced to close their doors due to the decrease in clientele but also the rising cost of doing

business in the area. It was costing more and more in insurance and security measures.

Prior to this project the Department addressed the problem at 27th and Benton in the traditional manner. We would respond on calls for service, handle the call, ie: the immediate problem, and then clear for service, never digging into the root of the problem. Individual officers made great strides toward trying to clean up the area with proactive work and concentrating on stopping the drug dealers whenever possible. However, these individual efforts were not making the desired impact on the problems.

The area of 27th and Benton was near the top of the list for repeat calls for service locations, within our division.

In addition to handling the calls the Tactical Response Units would routinely patrol the area trying to curtail the activity.

In recent years the area became so violent that it became necessary to send three or four officers on the calls so that one could stay with the police cars to ensure that they were not damaged and to have extra backup close by in the event that the other officers needed help.

Prior to this problem there had never been an organized, long term, multi faceted approach taken to 27th and Benton. The Community Action Team of the East Patrol Division decided to work this from every angle and give the citizens of the area a place to be proud of instead of a place to avoid.

The CAT team started the project by entering into the scanning and analysis phases. The Officers first contacted the apartment management companies that manage the buildings in the area. These companies do not have their offices in the same area as the buildings so they felt comfortable talking with and assisting the

officers since they offenders could not see that they were helping the Police. They were all very cooperative. They gave the officers access to several apartments.

The officers would enter the building very early in the morning with three officers and one would leave a short time later to drive the car away while the other two would stay in the unoccupied apartment until late afternoon or night and film the drug activity. Since the officers would enter the building and stay for hours, anyone that saw them enter would assume that they had missed the other two leave and resume the activity that they would not normally do in front of the police.

The officers met on numerous occasions with the management companies and obtained from them the building listings of all occupants. The officers then would conduct computer checks on all of these individuals to find out exactly who they were dealing with.

While some of the CAT team was working with the management others were reviewing any reports that had been written over the last six months in the area and going over computer printouts to obtain the nature of the calls for service to the area. From these reports we learned that most of the reports and calls were in relation to the drug activity. We felt that the narcotics sales were the catalyst for most of the calls and that if we could reduce the sales we would be able to stop many of the other problems that were causing a decrease in the quality of life at 27th and Benton.

In further research, the officers obtained a list of all property owners in the area so that they could hold the correct party accountable for actions being taken on private property.

Many of these owners were contacted by mail and asked to cleanup their property. Some of the absentee owners responded, however many did not. Therefore, the CAT team took another, more aggressive avenue and contacted the Jackson County Drug Abatement Response Team (DART), HUD, and the city health inspectors. The CAT team provided them with the necessary reports so that they could respond under their bailiwicks. Through these organizations the main nuisance house and drug retailer was closed. As a result of this no one is allowed on the premises without a permit from the county, and that is only for the purpose of doing work in order to improve the structure.

As mentioned before the officers ran into a hurdle regarding eliminated loitering in the parking lot of the liquor store. They had initiated a working relationship with the owners of the liquor store who was willing to sign trespass complaints on the loiters. In direct conflict of this they began to sell grilled chicken to the loiters on the lot. The Health Department concentrated on the issue of selling cooked food in the parking lot of the liquor store. With their assistance in stopping this practice the officers were able to clear the lot and resume issuing trespass complaints.

The officers visually observed the area for hours in order to get a good handle on what structural aspects were lending themselves to the problem. Such as, bus stops, lighting, traffic signals, bushes etc..

The information collected was reviewed and then the officers contacted the Street Narcotics Unit and the Gang Unit so that they could coordinate their efforts in the area.

In an effort to collect as much information as possible the officers and sergeant gave as many citizens as possible their office numbers and pager numbers so that they would feel free to exchange information at any time. This free flow of information became very helpful. The residents of the area directed the officers to criminal activity that could not see from our cars but that they had a clear view of from their bedroom or kitchen. They used this method of communication because of the trust that was built by the officers and their growing confidence in our work.

The obstacle most often encountered in gathering information was the lack of trust of confidentiality felt by the citizens toward the police. As the project gained recognition more and more people came to the officers with information. At times the officers had to agree to meet parties at the police station or other inconspicuous places to gain the needed intelligence. Through the perseverance of the officers a rapport has been built with many citizens that formally would not have considered getting involved.

The CAT team had three goals to reach in this project.

- Decrease the number of calls to this location.
- Curtail the drug activity on the corners of 27th and Benton.
- Improve the quality of life in the area.

Some of the strategies that the CAT team used have already been discussed. However, one of the things that was needed to improve the area was to lessen the attraction of the corners to the drug dealers. Since they used the pay phones to conduct their business, the CAT team contacted the phone company and had the phones shut off after 6:00 p.m. so that they were inaccessible during the high drug trafficking hours. The bus stops were used as



meeting points for the dealers, so the officers convinced the bus company to move the bus stops down into the middle of the block, making it less convenient to talk on the phone and stand near the bus stop at the same time.

The front of the apartment buildings had heavy foliage and was very dark, providing a haven for transactions that could be conducted right on the street and still be out of view of passers-by. The Public Works Department of the city was very cooperative in trimming these trees. The Kansas City Power and light Company installed stronger, experimental lighting that proved to be very helpful to our cause. We could now see the fronts of the buildings and the dealers felt much more exposed.

The parking around the area was basically unrestricted making it easy to park your car and purchase drugs,. The dealers were also able to park close by so that they could either store the drugs in their vehicles or use them for a quick exit out of the area. This problem was addressed by contacting the traffic unit who then contacted the city and had more restrictive parking signs installed. Now the officers are able to regulate the length of time cars are parked along the corners so that there is not the congestion of traffic and pedestrians along the curbs.

The zero tolerance approach to the area was enhanced by use of foot patrol and frequent car patrols. The officers found that as they approached the area people would leave and then abruptly return as soon as the officers left. To provide an element of surprise, the officers began to ride the city bus into the area. The officers would board the bus from in front of the police station and ride in the twenty or so blocks to the area. The buses

are tented so the dealers could not see the officers inside until they exited the bus at 27th and Benton. This proved to be an effective strategy.

To reach the goals of the project the CAT team felt that they needed to expand their concentration so they visited the D.A. Holmes Elementary School and familiarized the students with the officers and the project. The officers try to make regular visits to the school in an attempt to lay the ground work for a better relationship with the youth in the area.

The Street Narcotics Unit assisted the CAT team in making several undercover buys in some of the houses in the area and obtaining search warrants resulting in drug recovery and closures of the drug houses.

As this project has progressed the goals created by the CAT team have been reached. The drug dealers in the area have either gone to jail to deal with narcotics charges or moved on to easier turf.

The rate of calls for service to the area has decreased by 20% since the onset of the project and over all serious crime has decreased by 34%.

27th and Benton has been a source of contention for not only the police, but also for the residents and citizens that are in that area. An area that was previously avoided is now being used for not only vehicular traffic but also it is becoming common place to once again see people out on porches and strolling the sidewalks. The manpower hours that were previously being used for answering the perpetual calls to 27th and Benton are now being used in other problem areas of the city. On the rare occasion that the police are called to this area, it is no longer necessary to send

three or four officers due to potential danger. This area is responded to just as any other neighborhood would be.

Although the CAT team has realized their initial goals, they have set into motion a plan to monitor their progress. They have worked in accordance with the Santa Fe Neighborhood Association to obtain a grant from the Kansas City Neighborhood Alliance in order to set up an alcohol and drug abuse program in the area. They will continue to visit the school in the area to preserve the positive relationship that they have built with the kids. The CAT team will continue to foster their integrated relationship with the community so that their hard work and accomplishments will not be wasted. It is the hope of the CAT team that these long term sub-projects will ensure the revitalization of the area.