

HERMAN GOLDSTEIN A



*No. 17
Team
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EL PASO POLICE DEPARTMENT

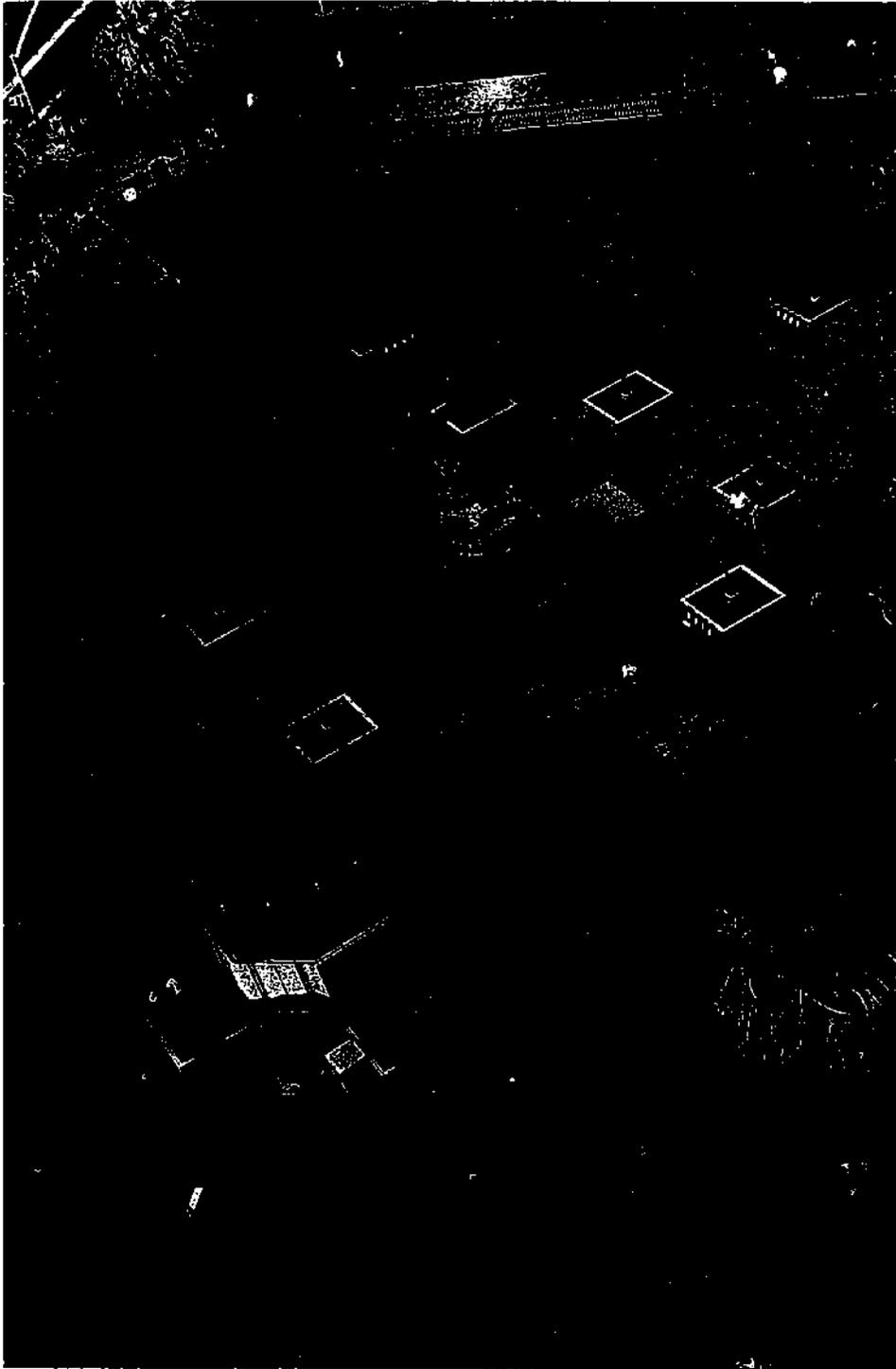
**SAN JACINTO PARK
RENOVATION ACTION PLAN**

THE SAN JACINTO PARK RENOVATION ACTION PLAN

SCANNING

The heart of downtown El Paso is the San Jacinto Park at 111 East Mills. This park was established at the turn of the century and consists of a square city block used by thousands of people on a daily basis. All of the City's mass transit bus routes start and end at "The Placita", or park. Buses line all four sides of the park throughout the day picking up and dropping off passengers from all over the City and the surrounding rural communities. The park is lined with various types of trees such a maple, birch, mulberry, and a few towering palm trees, affording the bus patrons needed shade from the customary blazing West Texas sun. In the center of the park is a water fountain sculpted in the form of three large alligators. In the early days of this historic park, there was a large pond inhabited by live alligators. Many families would drive to the downtown area, park their cars around the park, and walk to enjoy a day of watching the alligators lay around in the sun. Sadly, the alligators were removed in the early 1970's. Vehicle parking around the perimeter of the park is no longer allowed, making way for the buses to provide curb side service at the park. But through it all, many citizens have fond memories of having seen those green giants laying around in their pond.

The park's problems started during the 1980's when there was a rapid expansion of the City away from the historical downtown area. More families could afford to drive to The park's problems started during the 1980's when there was a rapid expansion of the other parts of the City without relying on mass transit. The City's economy was booming with new shopping malls being built on the outskirts of the City. Yet still, a certain percentage of the population could not afford their own transportation and had to rely on the buses to get around. The San Jacinto Park was designated as the hub of all mass transit by the City, which caused the small park to be



SAN JACINTO PARK

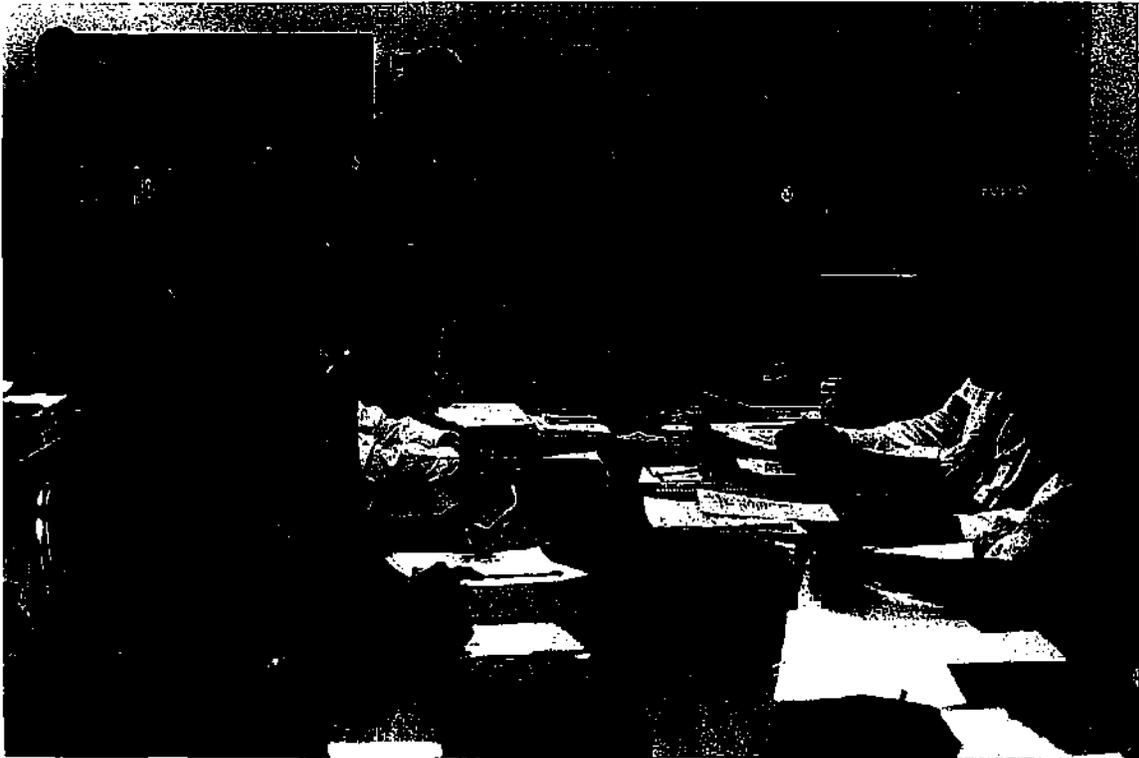
flooded with thousands of commuters every day. The people waiting to transfer from one bus to another no longer regarded the park as an historical location, but treated it as a large bus depot and dumping ground.

The park is located about twelve blocks from the United States/Mexico international border. Illegal immigration, caused mainly by the peso devaluation in the mid 1980's, was rampant in the downtown area as well as the smuggling of narcotics being sold to the large crowds gathering in the heart of the City. The downtown area was dependent on Mexican shoppers that cross the border and buy American products at reasonable prices. With the devaluation, most shoppers could no longer afford to buy American and stayed in Mexico. Downtown merchants closed many businesses and left the area. It was evident that along with the economic problems facing the downtown area, a social decay was taking over, especially in the park. There was an increase in prostitution, the open sale and use of narcotics, vagrancy, theft, assault, and robbery. Beside the criminal offenses, some less noticed violations, such as unlicensed mobile food vendors and the sale of untaxed cigarettes, also increased.

During the 1990's, the situation in the park intensified prompting the City government, the downtown business associations, and the El Paso Police Department to identify and attempt to resolve the problems. The downtown businesses wanted to revitalize the area. The City government was being pressured by the citizens for more security and better maintenance at the park. At the same time, the central police station was undergoing major renovations which forced the police officers to report to another station a few miles away from downtown. Crime increased due to the lack of police presence. It seemed that the park had no hope of being saved from its downward spiral into decay and disarray. But things would soon change.

ANALYSIS

In 1995, several things happened within the El Paso Police Department that would contribute directly to the revitalizing of the San Jacinto park. First, a new Chief of Police, Russ Leach, was appointed. Chief Leach is a twenty year veteran of the Los Angeles Police Department and very knowledgeable in the latest developments associated with community policing. The Chief stressed the importance of interacting with the community and hearing their concerns about quality of life issues in the area. Second, the central police station renovations were completed, and it became the Central Regional Command Center, overseen by Commander J.R. Grijalva, an eighteen year veteran of the police force. The Central officers were back in the downtown area patrolling the businesses and the park. With the new station came a new police philosophy. Commander Grijalva asked for assistance from the community and formed the first Citizens' Advisory Board made up of volunteers who lived or worked in the Central area. Also, the Bike Patrol, beat patrol, and the Police Area Representative (PAR) units were formed.



CENTRAL REGIONAL COMMAND'S CITIZENS' ADVISORY BOARD

The Board elected a chairperson, Mrs. Evelyn Bourquin, who was instrumental in setting up three "action plans", one of them being the renovation of San Jacinto Park. The Board prepared a survey to identify problems and develop a creative solution to solve the park's problems. The survey identified deficiencies in how the park's problems were being handled by patrol officers:

1. The only contribution from the community would be the occasional call to complain about the street vendors, transients, and drug dealers.
2. The patrol officers were responding to the same types of calls at all hours of the day and night.
3. Most of the crime problem in the park was attributed to the same gang or group of repeat offenders who worked out of the park. These criminals targeted elderly men and women, robbing them of their purses and wallets. These thefts were linked to the sale and purchase of illegal drugs in and around the park.
4. Other offenses included selling untaxed cigarettes by the carton or by the box load, usually for half the retail price, and prostitution.

It was evident that a criminal element had taken over the park due to the apathy of the downtown community. People downtown shied away from the park, particularly after dark, but even during lunch time, because they were afraid of falling victim to these criminals. The ongoing problems in the park were being handled in a traditional reactive manner: the patrol unit would respond to a call, make the needed arrest, and then be tied up at the station with paper work. In the meantime, the park would be under the control of the criminal element. An occasional sting

operation, with several units cooperating, would result in a short term solution, but not the one needed to control the crime problem at the park.

The analysis also revealed that the crime problem was noticed mostly by the bus riding community during the busy daylight hours. The park is in the middle of a commercial, business, and banking area with little, if any, residential zones nearby. The park had to fend for itself at night since the population in the park was mostly transients and homeless people who had little or no ties to the area. There was little concern by anyone to care for the park or report crime occurring at night. The Central patrol officers were answering calls for service in the outlying residential areas during the graveyard shifts. The problems in the downtown area were specifically tied to the park due to its accessibility by bus routes as well as for its reputation as a haven for drug dealing and prostitution. The park's reputation needed to be addressed and turned around before any other renovations could take place. After the distribution of the survey, other downtown organizations, such as the Downtown Businessmen's Association, the South El Paso Revitalization and Renovation Association, and the Downtown Development District, got together and had open discussions about the problem.

RESPONSE

During various meetings held around downtown, a wide range of possible response alternatives were considered. The ideas ranged from using a group of civilian volunteers to walk the park without any police intervention, to the other extreme of taking back control of the park using a high degree of police resources beyond the capability of the Department. The downtown associations agreed that the Citizens' Advisory Board could best address the problem. The Board requested a proactive patrol in the park that would include participation of the community.

Commander Grijalva assigned the task to the Central Regional Command's Metro Section and Community Services Section, under the command of Lt. Patrick Gailey, a fourteen year veteran of the El Paso Police Department. Lt. Gailey obtained literature and attended some of the first community policing problem solving seminars in which the SARA process was discussed. Armed with this new method of policing, the lieutenant was able to formulate a plan using the elements already in use in the Metro and Community Services units. The Metro Section comprises the Bike Patrol Unit, Walking Beats Unit, Three Wheel Traffic Enforcement Unit, Central's Undercover Impact Team, the Police Area Representatives (PAR) Unit, and the newly formed Citizens On Patrol (COPS) program. The Community Services Unit, under the direction of Sgt. James Arbogast, includes the Police Area Representatives (PAR), with store front, School Resource, and Crime Prevention officers. The PAR officers respond to problems or other concerns within a specific police district very much like POP officers in other police departments. These veteran officers use common sense approaches to problems when working with the community and hearing their concerns. The PAR officers attended meetings of the various community groups and kept the businesses informed on the progress in the park as well as reporting the groups' concerns to the Advisory Board. They assisted other units in the park during surveillance, checking wanted subjects, and made arrests.

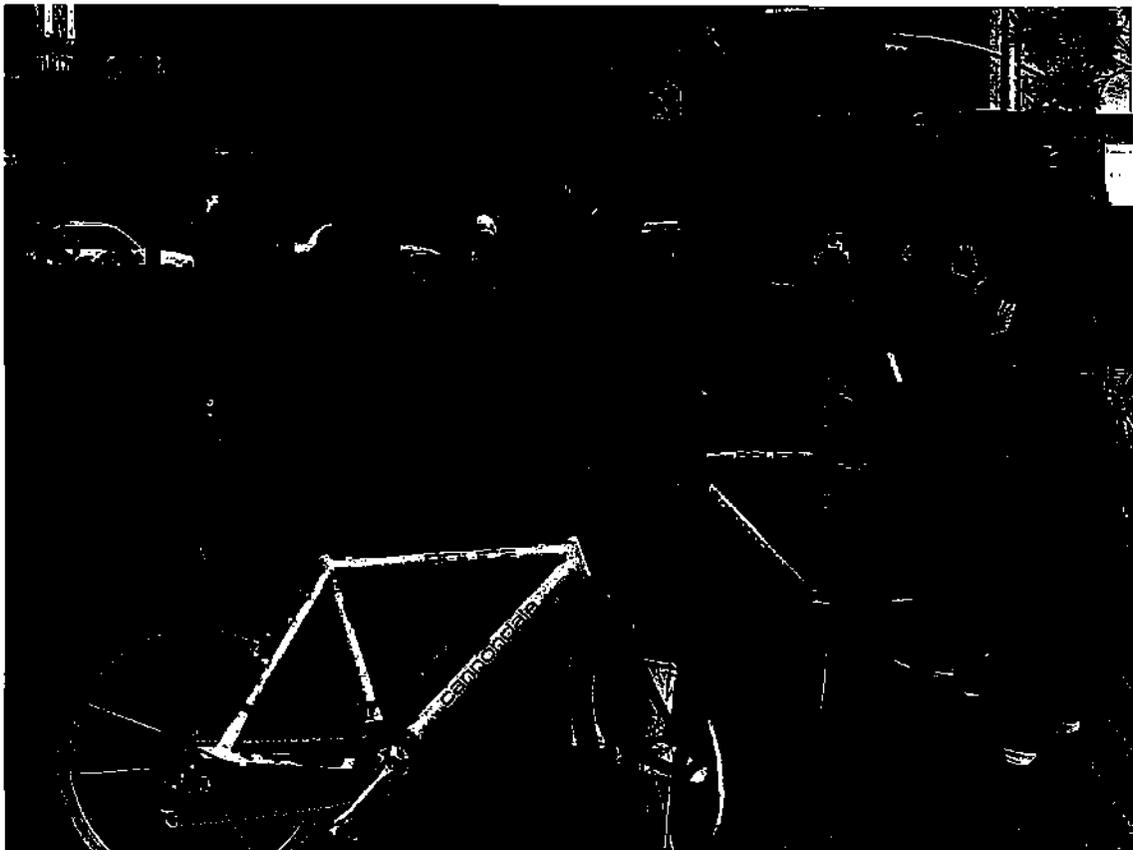
The Metro Section took a proactive approach to the park problem by escalating police presence and addressing the specific problems identified in the survey. With information provided by Central's Crime Analyst, Officer Klaus Mansion, each Unit concentrated on a specific group and activity. For example, the Undercover Impact Team, under the command of Sgt. Carl Lopresti, concentrated on known drug dealers in the area. They identified the times and locations of the sales as well as the customers who entered the area to make the transactions. Arrests were

made in the park and in the surrounding downtown area. The Walking Beat Unit, under the command of Sgt. Ken Adcox, patrolled the park continuously from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The two-men teams familiarized themselves with the street vendors, checking for City permits, County food handler permits, proper identification, and any municipal code violations before taking any type of action against them. They identified the undocumented aliens who were responsible for selling untaxed cigarettes.



CENTRAL REGIONAL COMMAND'S METRO SECTION

The Bike Patrol Unit, under the command of Sgt. Eric Shelton, uses 10-speed mountain bikes to patrol the park. They checked subjects in and around the park who appeared to be casing elderly people, likely victims of theft. The hit and run type of theft was reduced considerably when word got around that the Bike Patrol Unit was catching the crooks faster than the Walking Beat Units. The Bike Patrol worked closely with the U.S. Border Patrol agents, passing on the specialized training of the bike unit.



CENTRAL REGIONAL COMMAND'S BIKE PATROL UNIT



Another new concept that helped revitalize the park was the implementation of the Citizens On Patrol (COP) program. With the added staffing of the COPS, the Walking Beat Units were able to increase their patrols in the park. The COPS program took off with flying colors. The call for civilian volunteers needed to walk a beat with a police officer was answered by businessmen, students, and several retirees. The volunteers are required to attend a two-hour training session covering topics from a general introduction to the program and the officers, to issues dealing with civil liability. Applicants must be at least eighteen years old, possess a valid photo identification, and not have been convicted of a felony or any Class A or B misdemeanors within the last two years. Those completing the training received a certificate. The volunteers were advised that they had no policing power or authority beyond that of a citizen, cannot carry any kind of weapon, and they were asked to avoid becoming involved in actual enforcement activities. The volunteers wear a jacket or t-shirt identifying them as COPS members.

The community's acceptance of the officers' efforts in the park, and the noticeable decrease in crime, was the most important evaluation criteria considered by the Police Department. The goal for the park was to build a partnership with the community and other City departments while combating the actual crime problem and the perceived threat of crime.

The officers in the park were able to identify a very basic problem that the rest of the community faced but no one seemed to care about or to address - the lack of clean, safe restroom facilities. The existing restrooms were in an old, World War II vintage, underground bomb shelter like facility. Most people were afraid to climb the long stairways which led to smelly, dirty restrooms, which provided a haven for the homeless and transients. The Beat officers voiced this

concern to the PAR officers, who brought the problem to the various renovation committees involved . By late 1995, the underground restrooms were closed permanently. Within five months, the Sun Metro bus company completed construction of a large, above ground, handicap accessible, security monitored, clean and safe public restroom facility. During the planning stages of the facility, a small section of the building was dedicated to house a satellite police office where walk-in reports could be taken from the officers working there as part of the park patrol.

ASSESSMENT

Another survey was taken in January, 1996 concerning cleanliness, safety and police presence. Opinions were asked of the Central patrol officers, business owners, and citizens in the downtown area. The results summarized below indicate that the fear of crime has been reduced.

Target Audience: Police Officers	Number surveyed: 35			
	Very well	Well	Fair	Not well
How do you feel the public/businesses respond to your presence in the downtown area?	17%	49%	31%	3%
	Very safe	Safe	Somewhat safe	Not safe
How do you view the safety of the downtown area at the moment?	6%	57%	34%	3%
	Graffiti	Trash	Criminal element	
What is your perception of the most significant problem in the downtown area?	22%	53%	25%	
	Good	Average	Bad	
How would you rate the cleanliness in the downtown area?	0%	11%	89%	

Target Audience: Citizens				Number surveyed: 100	
	Everyday	Every other day	Once a week	Once a month	Other
How often are you at the park?	32%	18%	24%	20%	6%
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Bad	Very bad
How would you rate the cleanliness of the park?	15%	35%	37%	8%	5%
	Very safe	Safe	Somewhat safe	Not safe	
How safe do you feel when you're at the park?	12%	28%	36%	24%	
	Too much	Adequate	More needed		
How would you rate the amount of police presence at the park?	8%	42%	50%		

Target Audience: Businesses				Number surveyed: 10	
	Too much	Adequate	More needed		
How do you feel about police presence in the downtown business area?	0%	60%	40%		
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Bad	Very bad
How would you rate the cleanliness of the downtown area?	0%	10%	70%	20%	0%
	Very fast	Fast	Satisfactory	Needs improvement	
How would you rate the response time of the police department downtown?	10%	0%	80%	10%	

A comparative crime analysis of the district in which the park is located, taken from the Uniform Crime Statistics, was made for the period of November, 1994 through July, 1995 and November, 1995 through July 1996. The Part I statistics include murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, vehicle theft, and arson. Neither time period had any occurrences of murder.

rape, or arson. Statistics for robbery (down 38%), assault (up 32%), burglary (down 63%), larceny (down 77%), vehicle theft (down 75%), with a total decrease in Part I crimes of 63%, proves a significant decrease in the actual crime rate.

Crime	Murder	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Burglary	Larceny	Vehicle Theft	Arson	Total
1994-95	0	0	8	19	8	138	4	0	177
1995-96	0	0	5	25	3	32	1	0	66

As the summer of 1996 draws to an end, the efforts that have been made by the Police Department and the downtown community are beginning to pay off. There has been a steady increase in tourism in the downtown area, specifically in the park. People have been able to shop and travel in the downtown area with less fear of crime due to increased police presence. Several buildings that were empty have new owners who have transformed them into thriving night time entertainment spots offering music, dancing, and other exciting activities.

There have been less incidents of crime occurring at the park. Its cleanliness and up keep has continued through efforts by the City Parks and Recreation Department. More people are using the clean restrooms across the street from the park. The police satellite station has a computer and printer, as well as a telephone. Another survey is being prepared by the Advisory Board to poll the public about the improvements in the park. The officers involved in the initial phase of the park patrols noticed that most of the homeless and transients have left the area. The repeat offenders have been incarcerated or have been reported to be working far away from the downtown area. Although there was a concern about displacement of the problem, the threat was minor since it would not have been possible to create the same type of atmosphere that had existed in the downtown area in any other similar location.

It appears that the combined efforts of the Police Department and other agencies has made an impact at the park. It will be some time before San Jacinto park is allowed to fall back into any sort of decay or disarray, that is not if SARA has anything to say about it.



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