
NOMINATION
FOR THE
FOURTH ANNUAL HERMAN GOLDSTEIN EXCELLENCE IN PROBLEM SOLVING

TITLE OF PROBLEM-SOLVING EFFORT:

DAMASCUS GARDENS
#G95-04

NOMINATED BY:

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AUGUST 1, 1996

MONTGOMERY COUNTY POLICE
PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING
DAMASCUS GARDENS

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OFFICERS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT;

SERGEANT MARK R. MILLER,	SUPERVISOR, GERMANTOWN COMMUNITY POLICING UNIT
CPL. RODERICK E. STEPHENS,	PROJECT COORDINATOR, GERMANTOWN COMMUNITY POLICING UNIT
PO3 JAMES J. MeWILLIAMS,	GERMANTOWN DISTRICT POP COORDINATOR
PO2 JOSEPH J. CENCULA,	PROJECT CO-LEADER FOR DAMASCUS GARDENS
PO1 MARK A. WHITE,	PROJECT CO-LEADER FOR DAMASCUS GARDENS

THE GERMANTOWN DISTRICT MOUNTAIN BIKE TEAM;

CPL. JACQUES CROOM	PO3 REINHOLD WINTERHALTER
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PO2 WILLIAM THOMAS	

MONTGOMERY COUNTY POLICE
GERMANTOWN DISTRICT
PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING
PROJECT # G95-04

SCANNING / ANALYSIS

THE DAMASCUS GARDENS APARTMENT IS A SEVEN BUILDING COMPLEX WITH 104 APARTMENT UNITS, LOCATED ON BETHESDA CHURCH ROAD, DAMASCUS MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND. THE APARTMENTS ARE A STATE ASSISTED HOUSING COMPLEX OVERSEEN BY THE HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION (H.O.C.). IN THE 12 MONTHS PERIOD BETWEEN JUNE 1994 AND JUNE 1995, THE POLICE RECEIVED 429 CALLS FOR SERVICE. PRACTICALLY ALL OF THE CALLS WERE FOR DRUNKS/DRINKING IN PUBLIC, DISORDERLY CONDUCT, AND C.D.S. VIOLATIONS. THE HIGH VOLUME OF POLICE SERVICE CALLS FOR THIS COMMUNITY HAS BEEN OCCURRING FOR SEVERAL YEARS. MOST OF THE RESIDENTS IN THE COMPLEX ARE UNEMPLOYED AND DEPENDANT ON THEIR WELFARE CHECKS, AND THE H.O.C. BENEFIT OF ESSENTIALLY FREE HOUSING. TRADITIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT WAS NOT WORKING IN THIS COMMUNITY. THE RESPONDING OFFICERS WOULD MAKE ARRESTS OR ISSUE CITATIONS FOR VIOLATIONS, BUT THIS DID NOT SEEM TO DETER THE CONTINUING CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES.

IT WAS DECIDED THAT THE FEAR OF BEING ARRESTED WAS NOT A DETERRENT FOR THE CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES GENERATED BY THE RESIDENTS OF DAMASCUS GARDENS. WE HAD TO DEVELOP A PLAN, SO THAT THE RESIDENTS WOULD PAY A COSTLY CONSEQUENCE FOR BEING INVOLVED IN ANY CRIMINAL ACTIVITY WITHIN THE CONFINES OF DAMASCUS GARDENS.

WE HAD TO DETERMINE WHAT WAS THE ONE THING THAT THE RESIDENTS DID NOT WANT TO LOSE. SO A PLAN WAS DEVELOPED TO SEEK THE EVICTION AND TERMINATION OF H.O.C. BENEFITS FOR ANYONE WHO IS A CONSTANT PROBLEM AND GENERATES CALLS FOR POLICE SERVICES DUE TO CRIMINAL ACTIVITY.

THE PROBLEMS WERE IDENTIFIED THROUGH INTERVIEWS AND WRITTEN SURVEYS GIVEN TO THE TENANTS AND THE RESIDENT MANAGER. ALSO THE GERMANTOWN CRIME ANALYST SUPPLIED STATISTICS ON ALL CALLS WITHIN THE DAMASCUS GARDENS APARTMENTS, BREAKING THEM DOWN BY DAYS OF THE WEEK, TIMES. TYPES OF CRIMES, ETC.

AS A RESULT, IT WAS DETERMINED THAT THE COMMUNITY OF DAMASCUS GARDENS WAS IN FEAR. BECAUSE THE DISORDER IN THE COMMUNITY WAS BASICALLY LEFT UNATTENDED OVER THE YEARS, MANY OF THE RESIDENTS FELT THEY WERE TRAPPED AND THAT THE POLICE DIDN'T CARE. ALTHOUGH ARRESTS WERE MADE, FURTHER CONCENTRATION ON THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF DISORDER WAS NECESSARY IN ORDER TO ASSURE THE COMMUNITY THAT THE POLICE WERE LEGITIMATE AND WANTED TO CHANGE THINGS.

IN MAY OF 1995, OFFICERS MARK WHITE AND JOSEPH CENCULA DECIDED TO PUT TOGETHER A COMMUNITY MEETING WITH THE RESIDENTS OF DAMASCUS GARDENS. THIS MEETING STEMMED FROM AN INCIDENT WHERE ONE MAN PULLED A GUN ON ANOTHER MAN IN FRONT OF A GROUP OF CHILDREN PLAYING AT THE PLAYGROUND. THE INCIDENT SEEMED NOT TO PHASE THE COMMUNITY AND THIS BROUGHT GREAT CONCERN TO OFFICERS

WHITE AND CENCULA. THE MEETING WAS HELD ON JUNE 13, 1995 WITH FIVE (5) OFFICERS AND FORTY (40) RESIDENTS IN ATTENDANCE. MANY OF THOSE WHO ATTENDED WERE RESIDENTS WHO EITHER CAUSED SOME OF THE PAST PROBLEMS, OR WERE SUSPECTED OF DEALING CDS. WHEN THE RESIDENT MANAGER WAS QUESTIONED ABOUT THIS, SHE SAID THAT MANY OF THE RESIDENTS DIDN'T BELIEVE THE POLICE WOULD BE AROUND FOR THE LONG TERM TO CHANGE THE COMMUNITY, AND THOUGHT ATTENDING THE MEETING WOULD BE A WASTE OF THEIR TIME.

RESPONSE

AFTER REVIEWING CRIMES STATISTICS, BREAKING DOWN POLICE CALLS FOR SERVICE, AND ANALYZING RESIDENTS SURVEYS AND COMMENTS, IT WAS DETERMINED THAT OUR GOAL WOULD BE TWOFOLD. (1) TO REDUCE POLICE CALLS FOR SERVICE; AND (2) TO BUILD A LONGTERM PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MANAGEMENT AND RESIDENTS.

TO ACCOMPLISH THESE OBJECTIVES THE CO-OPERATION OF THE BEAT CARS, COMMUNITY POLICING OFFICERS, AND PROPERTY MANAGERS WAS NEEDED AS IT APPEARED THAT TRADITIONAL ENFORCEMENT WAS NOT WORKING. AS A RESULT, THE FOLLOWING STRATEGY WAS IMPLEMENTED. THE FIRST STEP WAS TO SOLICIT THE ASSISTANCE AND CO-OPERATION OF THE PROPERTY MANAGER.

GERMANTOWN STATION POP COORDINATOR, OFFICER J.J. McWILLIAMS AND THE RESIDENT MANAGER JUDY HATCHER STARTED BY WORKING WITH ZALCO REALTY ATTORNEYS TO CREATE A LEASE ADDENDUM STATING THAT NO ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES ARE TO BE CONSUMED IN THE

COMMON/ENTRANCE AREAS. LOITERING IN COMMON/ENTRANCE AREAS WOULD BE PROHIBITED AND ALL VEHICLES BELONGING TO THE RESIDENTS MUST HAVE PARKING PERMITS. THE ADDENDUM INCLUDED A CLAUSE MAKING RESIDENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACTIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN AND GUESTS.

WHEN RESIDENTS SIGNED OFF ON THE ADDENDUM THEY WERE ADVISED THAT ANY VIOLATION OF THE LEASE AGREEMENT WOULD LEAD TO A THIRTY (30) DAY NOTICE TO VACATE, OR A RENT INCREASE. A PROJECT BOOK WAS CREATED LISTING ALL THE RESIDENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN, ALONG WITH PARKING PERMIT NUMBERS. ALSO IN THE BOOK WAS A CURRENT LIST OF ALL ACTIVE TRESPASS NOTICES. ALL OF THE DAMASCUS BEAT CARS WERE GIVEN A COPY OF THE PROJECT BOOK AND SMALLER VERSIONS WERE CREATED TO ALLOW THE COMMUNITY POLICING MOUNTAIN BIKE TEAM TO CARRY THE PROJECT BOOK IN THEIR SADDLE BAGS. THE PROJECT BOOK IS REGULARLY UPDATED BY MANAGEMENT SO A CURRENT RESIDENT LIST IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE.

IN ORDER TO TARGET GUEST OF THE RESIDENTS, THE RESIDENT MANAGER AND OFFICER McWILLIAMS DEVELOPED A TRESPASS NOTICE. THIS NOTICE INCORPORATED ALL ASPECTS OF OUR DEPARTMENT'S MCP 170 NOTICE OF TRESPASSING FORM, PLUS RESIDENT INFORMATION AND THE RESIDENT MANAGER'S SIGNATURE REQUESTING THE POLICE TO ACT AS AN AGENT OF ZALCO REALTY.

OFFICERS HAD TO TAKE A "NO NONSENSE POLICY." SIGNS WERE PLACED IN THE ENTRANCE AREA OF ALL SEVEN BUILDINGS STATING

"NO LOITERING" AND "NO TRESPASSING." THIS WAS THE ONLY WARNING PEOPLE WERE GIVEN. OFFICERS WERE INSTRUCTED TO WRITE CITATIONS FOR ALL WHO VIOLATED THE WARNING AND TO WRITE NO TRESPASS ORDERS TO ALL NON-RESIDENTS WHO VIOLATE THE LAW. IF NON-RESIDENTS WERE INVOLVED IN DISORDERLY ACTIVITY FOR WHICH THEY COULD BE ARRESTED, OFFICERS WERE ASKED TO GIVE THESE NON-RESIDENTS A NO TRESPASS NOTICE TO DOCUMENT THEIR ACTIVITY IF AN ARREST WAS NOT MADE. OFFICERS WERE ASKED^TO MAKE COPIES OF ANY CITATIONS, ARREST REPORTS, OR TRESPASS ORDERS AND FORWARD THEM TO OFFICER McWILLIAMS.

WITH MANAGEMENT'S TRUST AND THEIR REALIZATION THAT WE WERE IN THIS FOR THE LONG-TERM, A PARTNERSHIP GREW. THE POLICE WOULD HANDLE THE CRIMINAL ASPECT AND ASSIST WITH THE CIVIL ASPECT. AFTER A CRIMINAL ARREST OR ISSUANCE OF A CITATION ON A RESIDENT, MANAGEMENT WOULD CONDUCT A RENT ADJUSTMENT AND START EVICTION PROCEEDINGS WOULD BE INITIATED. SINCE NOVEMBER 1995, THE POLICE AND DAMASCUS GARDENS HAVE EVICTED 10 FAMILIES ON 11 EVICTION HEARINGS.

THE NEXT ISSUE TO BE TARGETED WAS THE SALE OF CDS IN THE PARKING LOT. THE OFFICERS USED DISPATCHED CALLS AND INFORMANTS TO DETERMINE THE BEST TIME AND LOCATION TO CONDUCT A SURVEILLANCE. THEY FOUND THAT RESIDENTS INVOLVED IN DRUG ACTIVITY WERE MOST ACTIVE IN THE BEGINNING OF THE MONTH, PROBABLY BECAUSE GOVERNMENT CHECKS WERE ISSUED THE FIRST FRIDAY OF EACH MONTH. OFFICERS WHITE AND CENCULA WORKED COVERT SURVEILLANCE

THEMSELVES AND WROTE CITATIONS FOR LOITERING AND TRESPASSING. AS THEY BECAME MORE AND MORE RECOGNIZED COVERT SURVEILLANCE BECAME IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM AND THE COMMUNITY POLICING TEAM SCHEDULED A r SURVEILLANCE FOR NOVEMBER 3RD AND 4TH, 1995. THE FIRST NIGHT WAS A GREAT SUCCESS. THE EXCELLENT TEAMWORK OF THE COMMUNITY POLICING TEAM LED TO THE ARREST OF THREE INDIVIDUALS FOR POSSESSION AND DISTRIBUTION OF CRACK COCAINE, AND THE RECOVERY OF NUMEROUS ROCKS OF CRACK COCAINE.

AS APARTMENTS WERE VACATED, THE CONCERN BECAME THE POSSIBILITY OF MORE INDIVIDUALS MOVING IN WHO WOULD CONTINUE SELLING DRUGS. TO COMBAT THIS, OFFICER McWILLIAMS BEGAN RUNNING CRIMINAL HISTORY CHECKS ON ALL APPLICANTS. NUMEROUS INDIVIDUALS WERE TURNED AWAY BECAUSE OF A HISTORY OF DRUG OFFENSES.

AFTER A FEW MONTHS, CALLS FOR SERVICE BEGAN TO DECREASE. THE EVICTIONS WERE ENFORCED AND THE RESIDENTS BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT THE COUNTY POLICE WERE GOING TO BE AROUND FOR THE LONG TERM. IN BETWEEN THE COVERT SURVEILLANCES, THE COMMUNITY POLICING BIKE TEAM WOULD PATROL THE AREA AND OFFICERS WHITE AND CENCULA WOULD WALK THE COMPLEX. THIS ACTIVITY HELPED TO DECREASE THE FOOT TRAFFIC IN THE PARKING LOT AND ULTIMATELY MADE THE NEIGHBORHOOD MUCH QUIETER AT NIGHT.

WITH NOTICEABLE INTEREST FROM THE RESIDENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OFFICERS, THE OWNER OF DAMASCUS GARDENS DECIDED TO CONDUCT A THREE-YEAR RENOVATION AND BEAUTIFICATION

PROGRAM FOR THE COMPLEX. ALONG WITH THIS, OFFICERS WHITE AND CENCULA ORGANIZED A COMMUNITY EVENT, "DAMASCUS GARDENS DAY," HELD ON MAY 11TH. LOCAL BUSINESSES DONATED OVER 35 PIZZAS AND DRINKS. DEMONSTRATIONS WERE CONDUCTED BY THE DAMASCUS VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY POLICE K-9 TEAM, A D.A.R.E. PROGRAM OFFICER, GERMANTOWN DISTRICT MOTOR UNIT AND MOUNTAIN BIKE TEAM. AN AREA RESIDENT OFFERED HER TIME TO DO FACE PAINTING FOR THE CHILDREN. BICYCLE HELMETS WERE DISTRIBUTED FREE OF CHARGE TO THE CHILDREN AND McGRUFF THE CRIME DOG MADE A SPECIAL APPEARANCE. THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY POLICE EXPLORERS WERE ALSO ON HAND TO ASSIST AND FINGERPRINT THE CHILDREN FOR THEIR PARENTS. THE TWO-HOUR EVENT BROUGHT OUT ABOUT 150 RESIDENTS WHO WERE VERY APPRECIATIVE OF ALL THAT THE POLICE WERE DOING.

THIS EFFORT HAS ONLY BECOME A GREAT SUCCESS BECAUSE OF THE COOPERATION AND TEAMWORK NOT ONLY FROM THE COMMUNITY POLICING TEAM AND THE MANAGEMENT STAFF WITHIN THE GERMANTOWN STATION, BUT FROM THE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY AS WELL.

ASSESSMENT

ANY ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT MUST BE MADE IN COMPARISON WITH THE ORIGINAL GOALS. THEY WERE (1) REDUCTION IN POLICE CALLS FOR SERVICES; AND (2) BUILDING A LONG TERM PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MANAGEMENT AND RESIDENTS.

IN COMPARING CALLS FOR SERVICE, IT MUST BE REMEMBERED

THAT DURING THIS PROJECT RESIDENTS WERE ENCOURAGED TO CALL THE POLICE WHEN THEY SAW VIOLATIONS OF THE LAW. IN SPITE OF THIS, CALLS FOR SERVICE HAVE BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY REDUCED. BETWEEN JUNE 1994 AND JUNE 1995 THE POLICE RECEIVED 429 CALLS FOR SERVICE. BETWEEN JULY 1995 AND JULY 1996 THE POLICE RECEIVED 263 CALLS. THIS IS A REDUCTION OF 166 CALLS.

THE SECOND GOAL IS A CONTINUING PROJECT. OUR EFFORTS ARE PROCEEDING WITH THE SAME ENTHUSIASM AND DEDICATION THAT WE FELT AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE PROJECT. THIS IS IN LARGE PART DUE TO THE CO-OPERATION WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING FROM BOTH THE RESIDENTS AND MANAGEMENT.

IN THE SPRING OF 1996 THE POLICE DEPARTMENT PASSED OUT WRITTEN SURVEYS TO MANY OF THE RESIDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY. THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY INDICATES THAT MOST OF THE RESIDENTS COMPLETING THE SURVEY FEEL THAT DAMASCUS GARDENS IS A SAFER PLACE TO LIVE. ALL OF THE RESPONDENTS RATE THE POLICE PERFORMANCE AS FAIR TO VERY GOOD. THE RESIDENTS GAUGE SUCCESS BY THE COMFORT LEVEL THAT FEEL WHEN THAT WALK OUTSIDE THEIR HOMES WITHOUT FEAR. THE SURVEYS INDICATE THE RESIDENTS FEEL A GREATER SENSE OF SECURITY BECAUSE CERTAIN CRIMES WHICH HAD BECOME COMMON TO THIS COMMUNITY HAVE BEEN GREATLY REDUCED. WITH THE CONTINUE OF POLICE PRESENCE, THE NEW LANDSCAPING, DAMASCUS GARDENS DAY, AND THE COMMITMENT FROM PROPERTY MANAGERS, THE RESIDENTS HAVE A RENEWED PRIDE IN THEIR COMMUNITY.

THE REAL SUCCESS IS SHOWN ON THE FACES OF THE RESIDENTS
WHO NOW KNOW THEIR POLICE DEPARTMENT IS IN PARTNERSHIP TOGETHER
WITH THEM TO SOLVE WHATEVER PROBLEMS THEY HAVE.

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