

REDONDO BEACH GANG PROJECT

COMBATING A GANG THROUGH CIVIL INJUNCTION

REDONDO BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT, CALIFORNIA, 1996

- THE PROBLEM:** In late 1995, residents complained of gang activity in and around Perry Park. The citizens were terrified and complained of intimidation, sounds of gunfire, drug dealing, and drunken gatherings at all hours of the night. Many of the gang members lived around the park, which served as a meeting place for gang members.
- ANALYSIS:** Research indicated that Perry Park was serving as an informal “headquarters” for gang activity. Numerous incidents of violent crime, weapons violations, drug and alcohol related activity, numerous fights, and graffiti were documented in the park.
- RESPONSE:** The nature and extent of the gang problem was documented in order to obtain an injunction against the gang. A preliminary injunction was granted prohibiting the named persons, gangsters, from conducting specific activities in Perry Park and the surrounding 24-block area.
- ASSESSMENT:** Statistical analysis has indicated that gang activity in the park has decreased. More importantly, the citizens’ perceptions of safety in the community have increased, and many law-abiding citizens now use the park for recreational activities.
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INTRODUCTION

In many ways Redondo Beach typifies the popular conception of Southern California living. The beach and bike path always seem to be crowded with sunbathers, volleyball players, and folks on roller blades. There is a pier with top quality restaurants and ample souvenir shops for tourists. The climate is typically neither too cold nor too warm and generally well-kept middle to upper middle class homes can be found. The city is a very desirable place to live.

There is another not so desirable aspect of Southern California living to be found in Redondo Beach—gangs. More accurately stated, one gang, the North Side Redondo (NSR) Gang also known as the Redondo 13, resides in the city.

Redondo Beach has been home to the NSR for over 40 years. NSR is a turf oriented street gang

currently in its third generation of membership. While primarily Hispanic, the gang also includes Caucasians, African Americans, and from time-to-time, Asians. NSR has a total membership of approximately 180 gangsters though at any given time the active membership is closer to 40. The gang claims the entire city of Redondo Beach as its turf and has resorted to violence to answer perceived transgressions. Members range in age from 14 years old to well into the 40s with the average age being 24.

In 1990, the Redondo Beach Police Department petitioned the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office to declare NSR a violent street gang under the authority of California Penal Code Section 186.22, the so called “Street Terrorist Act.” The District Attorney granted our request recognizing the violent nature of the gang.

Over the years NSR members have been involved in many violent and illegal acts. In 1993 the NSR engaged in a “war” with a rival gang that resulted in three homicides and 11 other shooting incidents. The war ended with the simultaneous service of 16 search warrants at NSR member homes combined with the arrests and convictions of several key members. Typical of NSR activity through the decades, in recent years there have been periods of extreme violence broken by periods of general quiet, usually brought about by heavy and aggressive law enforcement interdiction.

In July of 1995, the Redondo Beach Police Department formally adopted the philosophy of community oriented policing. Officers and other department personnel were encouraged to be creative and develop solutions to problems and not “just put out forest fires.”

One such solution was a novel approach to dealing with the NSR. The concept involved personnel from throughout the department as well as the community and the District Attorney’s Office. The solution followed the Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment (SARA) Model right down the line.

SCANNING

In late 1995, Community Based Officer Bob Remington began to receive complaints from residents bordering Perry Park. There was high gang presence and activity in and around the park. Officer Remington was aware of a recent gang related shooting within blocks of the park. He believed it was appropriate to organize a community meeting to discuss the situation. The meeting was held in November 1995. In attendance were residents of the area as well as the Chief of Police, various our command staff, the City Prosecutor, gang officers, and city officials including council members.

By the end of the meeting all of the police personnel in attendance were in agreement that there was a problem at Perry Park, at the very least in terms of perception of safety by the residents. Citizens were terrified. Residents had offered anecdotal accounts of intimidation, sounds of gunfire, drug dealing, and drunken gatherings at all hours of the night. Mother after

mother told of their fear to take their children to the park.

The police officers familiar with the NSR believed that there was a factual basis for the fears. Perry Park was roughly the geographic center around which a number of NSR members lived. The park was long known as a gathering place for NSR gangsters.

At the end of the meeting City Prosecutor Mike Webb addressed the audience and an idea began to form. Mike explained that he would concentrate the fullest prosecution for crimes in and around the area and promised to utilize probation conditions whenever possible to prohibit offenders from coming into the park. Then he began to talk in vague terms about an injunction, a civil process that had been moderately successful in curbing gang activity in a handful of other jurisdictions. Though he only discussed the process for just a few minutes, by the end of the meeting Mike and several officers present had already decided in their own minds that we should move forward with a civil injunction.

ANALYSIS

The next week Mike Webb called for a meeting to explore the possibility of our department obtaining a civil injunction restricting activities of NSR in and around Perry Park.

In attendance at that and many future meetings were: Mr. Webb; Lt. John Skipper, Patrol Division Commander; Sgt. Phil Keenan, Gang Enforcement Supervisor and recognized gang expert; Officer Diane Wattles, School Resource Officer; Officer Bob Remington, Community Based Officer; and Dawn Switzer, Crime Analyst. Representatives attended other meetings over the next four months from Investigations Division, Special Operations Division and upper command level personnel.

Mike kicked off the meeting by explaining that obtaining a civil injunction essentially involved filing a lawsuit against the NSR charging and proving, that they were a nuisance thereby restricting their activity via a court order. Mike pointed out that this was a relatively new tactic and only a few cities had been successful. He

also pointed out that those cities had a significantly higher degree of crime than Redondo Beach coupled with larger and more active gangs.

After a great deal of discussion it was agreed that we had a factual long-standing problem with the NSR. Furthermore, the current problems with the gang were occurring in and around Perry Park. Everyone agreed that a civil injunction was a potential solution, at least in part, to the problem.

Over the next several months, members of the team went about the arduous task of proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that a problem existed in Perry Park:

- Sgt. Phil Keenan and Officer Wattles located and examined over 1,800 calls for service at or near Perry Park painstakingly determining which were gang related and which were not.
- Mike Webb obtained declarations from officers throughout the department recounting day-to-day activity in and around Perry Park, which had not been documented in other formats.
- Officer Remington obtained declarations from residents in the area that told of their fears and incidents with NSR that caused these fears.
- Officer Wattles provided valuable background information and intelligence relating to the recruitment of new members and gang activity in the schools.
- Sgt. Keenan and Officer Wattles provided separate declarations based on their gang expertise that proved crucial to the injunction process.

The hard work paid off. After conducting the research, it became apparent that Perry Park was serving as an informal “headquarters” for NSR activity. Committee members were able to find documentation of violent crime, weapons violations, drug and alcohol related activity as well as numerous fights and graffiti.

We also learned that the park was the location where new members were “jumped in,” slang for the process for formal induction into the gang by being physically beaten by other gang members.

In the words of Sgt. Keenan's injunction declaration, “Logistically Perry Park is the single most significant factor (location) in the growing strength of NSR.” In addition to this, rival gangs were also aware of the significance of Perry Park to NSR. This only increased the potential for violent confrontations taking place in the surrounding residential area.

RESPONSE

When the committee was comfortable with the fact that we could document that a problem clearly existed, we began assembling that information as supporting documentation for the injunction. Once assembled, this document was 250 pages in length.

The next step in the process required the presentation of documentation in court to secure a temporary restraining order (TRO) and then set a date for a hearing. A judge granted the TRO on May 1, 1996.

Mike Webb, Sgt. Keenan, and Officer Wattles carried out the extremely tedious, time-consuming process. In addition to the significant undertaking described, the employees named were still responsible for carrying out their primary day-to-day duties. As a consequence, much of the work on the injunction was done on their own time.

After the TRO was obtained, we were required to serve each gang member named in the injunction (a total of 28 key members) with a copy of the injunction and advise him or her of the hearing date. Between 5pm on May 1st and 5am on May 2nd, Community Service Officers from Administrative Services Division copied and prepared over 11,000 pages of documentation required for the service.

At 5 am on May 2nd approximately 30 officers from every division in the department participated in serving the TRO. Several arrests

were made during the service for narcotics possession and outstanding warrants.

The hearing date was set for May 22, 1996. During the interim, Patrol Division played an important role in providing a high profile presence in the park and making three arrests for violations of the TRO.

On May 22 the initial hearing was held as scheduled. Preparation for the hearing also proved to be a lesson in departmental and interdepartmental cooperation as Redondo Patrol, SWAT, Gang and Investigations personnel worked together to develop and implement a comprehensive security plan with the Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department court deputies. The hearing was well attended by NSR members and their families as well as a large contingent of pro-injunction citizens organized with the help of Community Based Officer Remington.

The result of the hearing was that NSR was granted a continuance to acquire legal representation. The TRO remained in effect until the next hearing date scheduled for June 28, 1996.

At this stage the injunction began to gain widespread local media attention in the press (the *LA Times* and *The Daily Breeze*) and talk radio (The John and Ken Show, a major LA area AM station).

The team held a meeting and decided on several new courses of action to take before the next hearing date:

- Sgt. Phil Keenan, Officer Diane Wattles, Gang Enforcement Officers Terry Jones and Jim Banach and the entire Special Investigations Unit (a surveillance team) were temporarily reassigned to work for the City Prosecutor full-time. In addition, the entire Motor Unit from Special Operations Division was made available on an as needed basis.
- The Gang Enforcement Team and the Special Investigations Unit, under the direction of Sgt. Keenan, were assigned to concentrate on high profile

enforcement activities aimed at key leadership figures in the NSR.

- Mike Webb, Officer Wattles and Sgt. Keenan worked to get selected NSR members named in the injunction to stipulate to the conditions of the injunction.
- Lt. Skipper and Lt. Minard (the Patrol and Investigations Division Commanders, respectively) contacted the head deputy of the local District Attorney's Office to solicit total cooperation in filings related to NSR members.

Within a couple of weeks the three NSR members viewed to be the "hardest" and recognized leaders of the gang had been arrested by the Gang Enforcement Team and the Special Investigations Unit for violations of probation or parole conditions that prohibited them from associating with other gang members.

As of this writing, all three are still in custody and one has been sentenced to two years in state prison. Stipulations to the conditions of the injunction were received from 11 of the 28 named NSR members. We were right on schedule with our strategy.

On May 24th circumstances developed that would thrust our injunction into the national media spotlight. Campaign coordinators for presidential candidate Bob Dole had picked up on the publicity the injunction was attracting. It just so happened that Mr. Dole planned to be in the Southern California area on May 29.

Lt. Skipper was contacted by representatives from Mr. Dole's campaign on May 24 and told that Mr. Dole, Governor Wilson, and California Attorney General Dan Lungren would speak at Perry Park on May 29 in support of our efforts.

During the next five days officers from throughout the department worked with Mr. Dole's staff, the US Secret Service and the California Highway Patrol in preparing logistical and security arrangements for the pending visit. Officer Remington played a key role as the logistical liaison. The rally was

conducted as scheduled and drew significant nationwide media attention. Mr. Dole personally congratulated all of the committee members for their efforts in working with the community to solve community problems.

The hearing took place on June 28th. The proceeding was again well attended by community supporters. The following morning the front-page headline of *The Daily Breeze* read: "RB's gang order 95% upheld." The headline was accurate. Judge Robert Mallano had made only minor alterations in the injunction and stated in court that the city had made a "compelling" argument and convinced him that a true problem existed in Perry Park therefore an injunction limiting the activities of NSR would be an appropriate remedy.

The city of Redondo Beach now has a preliminary injunction, viable for three years and, if unchallenged, then it becomes permanent against NSR. The order prohibits the named persons, gangsters, from conducting specific activities in Perry Park and the surrounding 24-block area.

The injunction specifically names 28 "hardcore" members of NSR and can be modified to add on up to 50 "John Does." There are 13 specific conditions of the injunction that the named individuals cannot violate such as a midnight curfew for adults and being in the presence of an individual with a weapon (including pipes and screwdrivers). A copy of the entire injunction is available.

ASSESSMENT

The results of the injunction were immediately realized. As soon as the injunction was granted to the city, citizens, and police personnel felt a sense of victory over a criminal organization. Police officers and residents of the area were reassured that "the System worked."

The team believes that the injunction has been a devastating blow to the gang. For the first time there is optimism that the NSR will be effectively dismantled as a criminal organization.

Early statistical analysis reflects a significant decrease in gang activity in and around Perry Park. Before the temporary restraining order, on average there were 42 gang related crimes per month in the area.

Since initiation of the injunction process the area has experienced a 38.58% decrease in similar activities. Of special note, violent crime and gang contacts are dramatically down.

More importantly, the citizens' perceptions of safety in the community have increased. Anecdotal information highlights a newfound sense of security that folks feel in and around Perry Park. The park this summer has been full of mothers and their children. Now teens and adults enjoy basketball and the other recreational activities that the park has to offer.

The LA County District Attorney's Office has asked Mike Webb for copies of the Redondo Beach injunction to use as a model when preparing injunctions in their jurisdiction. A neighboring city, Lawndale, has also approached our city with a proposal to hire Mr. Webb and utilize some of our gang officers in assisting them to draft their own injunction.

The process of obtaining the injunction resulted in a huge success for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, it provided law enforcement with a useful tool to combat gang related crime, which had been driving a difficult and long-standing set of inter-related problems in our community. It also demonstrates to the citizens of Redondo Beach the willingness of the police department to work to solve problems. Furthermore, it serves as an example of the effectiveness of community involvement in the problem solving process. Likewise, the process demonstrated to department personnel how intradepartmental and, inter-departmental cooperation can be most effective in the utilization of available resources to solve chronic problems.

NOTES

1. Although virtually every member of the department was involved in this process, there were several key personnel who

carried out the bulk of the work. They are the team that brought it all together:

- City Prosecutor Mike Webb conceived the idea and prepared all of the legal documents. After the injunction was granted, Police Chief Mel Nichols commented about Mike's dedication and determination, "In 33 years of law enforcement, I don't recall ever seeing anyone work as hard or put in as many hours on a project as Mike did on this one." For four months Mike Webb worked long hours, 15 and 20-hour days were common, including weekends. The LA County District Attorney's Office will "hire out" attorneys to obtain injunctions for cities at a cost of \$100,000. Mike obtained our injunction for no legal cost other than his regular salary.
- Sgt. Phil Keenan and Officer Diane Wattles also worked hundreds of extra hours on this project. In the beginning they were assigned to work on the injunction in addition to their day-to-day duties. A month before the June 28th hearing they worked full-time on the project. The gang expertise and rapport they have with NSR members proved extremely valuable in securing the injunction. As to their participation, Chief Nichols commented, "Simply stated, we would not have obtained the injunction without Sgt. Keenan and Officer Wattles."
- Officer Bob Remington first identified the problem through his contacts with the members of the community in "his area." He took steps to set-up the meeting that was the catalyst for

all of the activity that followed thereafter. Bob was always eager to assist in any way possible. He attended and had input at every meeting. Perhaps his greatest effort was his organization of the community during Mr. Dole's visit. He handled every logistical assignment in putting together the major event. Concerning Officer Remington's support, Chief Nichols said, "Bob has shined our collective badge"

- As to Lt. Skipper, the Chief recognized the depth and breath of his efforts by declaring, "John coordinated and delivered the whole operational package."
2. Many other people from within and outside our department contributed to the project. Our public information officer was involved, clerical staff helped, and a variety of community groups were of invaluable assistance. The gang injunction project was built on the SARA model. The project is a classic example of the way community oriented Policing and problem solving can work!