



Nomination  
for the  
Herman Goldstein Excellence in  
Problem Solving Award

*submitted by:*

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This project was successful due to the teamwork and dedication of:

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Sergeant Paul Becotte

Officer Michael Hastings

Officer Ramona Hastings

Officer Marco Perez

Officer Craig Marshall

and the

San Diego Police Department Volunteers

## INTRODUCTION

San Diego, California is the oldest city in California, situated on San Diego Bay 110 miles southeast of Los Angeles and about 15 miles from the Mexican border. It is the seat of San Diego County. The city's population has continually increased because of San Diego's superb harbor, beautiful settings, and its mild, even climate.

Situated in the northern area of the city is the University of California, San Diego college campus, University Town Center, and a residential community known as Coste Verde. The prestigious area of Coste Verde is located in service area 115.

Auto thefts and burglaries are the number one property crime within the City of San Diego. In 1996, 961 auto thefts occurred within the northern most part of the city. Of the 961 thefts, 438 or 46% occurred within the 115 service area. Additionally, 1563 vehicle burglaries were reported within that same area of the city. This community, along with the surrounding neighborhoods, had the third highest auto burglary rate within the City of San Diego. No other property crime came close in comparison in monetary loss or out of service time for officers of the San Diego Police Department. The trend had been increasing in this area for almost a decade. One property management company reported losing more than \$144,000 a year as a consequence of this type of crime.

This project was formulated not only to curb the staggering auto crime rate but was also structured so the analysis portion would identify the victim's specific behavior, locations of the crimes, and the identification of the suspect(s). These items, after being reviewed, allowed for permanent target hardening from crime prevention through environmental design. Once target hardening and apprehension were started, statistics showed the recurrence rate of the crime dramatically declined.

## SCANNING

The community of Coste Verde is approximately one square mile. The make-up of the community includes high end apartments and condominiums where the median price is more than \$200,000. Some buildings tower more than four stories tall. Most of the apartment buildings have several different addresses and the starting rent is more than \$800 per month. The community consists primarily of working professionals with an average of two cars per household. The parking facilities are mainly unsecured underground parking structures. The apartment and condominium complexes are designed to provide the occupants with privacy and do not allow for viewing of the parking structures. The layouts of the complexes provide even the novice of car prowlers the luxury of seclusion and concealment.

In August of 1996, an abundance of vehicle related crimes were reported in the 110 service areas, which includes the 115 service area. An inquiry with the Department's Crime Analysis unit revealed most calls for service were spent on vehicle related crimes in the Coste Verde area. In addition, the San Diego Police Department began conducting neighborhood watch community meetings. During these meetings, it was discovered the residents in the community were unaware of the volume of crimes occurring. The only time it came to their attention was when they became victims.

A smaller section of the Coste Verde area appeared to have the largest number of crimes. Although it is only one square mile, it suffered a monthly average of 35.2 vehicle burglaries from September of 1996 through January of 1997. This, in proportion to the total amount of residents, 13,032, showed that each citizen had a high probability of being victimized.

The City of San Diego Police Department has in place a Telephone Report Unit at each of its eight commands. The unit is staffed with sworn light duty employees and civilian volunteers. They take reports when no suspect information is available, e.g., vehicle burglaries, car thefts, and petty thefts. These cases are generally not assigned to a detective due to the lack of suspect information. During the time frame of this project, the Northern Telephone Unit said the bulk of their work load was from the vehicle burglaries in the Coste Verde area.

To combat the rising crime of vehicle burglaries within Coste Verde, all of the patrol officers and sergeants working in the service area were informed of the situation. The sergeants, community relations officer, an auto theft detective, and the lieutenant met to discuss the problem. A training session was conducted for the fifty-five officers. The officers were provided information on how crime can be prevented through environmental design and about services available from using the technological advances of the Crime Analysis Department. In addition, a portion of the day long training included looking at the car burglary problem. Officers were encouraged to share their ideas on how to put a stop to the vehicle burglaries in this area.

### ANALYSTS

Several victims/stakeholders were identified through the analysis process. These victims included the San Diego Police Department, property owners and their management companies, insurance agencies, tenants, visitors, and guests. The police department suffered a burden because of the large number of vehicle break-ins. Communications would receive a call from a victim and in turn, dispatch an incident to the Telephone Report Unit for a report to be taken. The Telephone Report Unit would complete a crime case and if there was no suspect information, no further investigation was done.

Determining the impact on the property owners and executive management companies exposure was a flagship of the analysis process. A complex within the Coste Verde area was chosen to determine the monetary losses to the property owners. Nobel Court Apartments are composed of 685 units and were being victimized by a multitude of car related thefts. The management company and the police department joined together and determined that within the last 12-month period, fifteen residents had stated their reason for moving was due to thefts of vehicles. At a starting rent of \$800 a month and with most tenants signing a one year rental agreement, the Nobel Court complex had lost \$144,000.

The insurance companies that held the policies on the victim's vehicles also had a substantial loss. However, although it was apparent there was an average monetary loss of \$1,500 per insurance claim, the citizens of San Diego as a whole, became victims due to insurance companies raising their premiums. Additionally, it was discovered that some insurance companies would not replace interiors in certain cars. Instead, they auctioned the car at a public auction. The suspect(s) who originally burglarized the interior of the car bought the same car at the auction. The suspect(s) would have a legal car from the auction, replace the stolen interior and sell the car tripling their profits in most cases.

The last victim and stakeholder addressed are the residents themselves. Herein lies the unique part of this project. To identify the habits of the people in the community accurately and to prepare a profile of the type of victims the suspect(s) were targeting, 350 surveys were hand delivered by the Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol. The results of the survey supported the need for tenant education and enlightened the police department that most tenants had been victimized multiple times. In addition, the police personnel discovered most repeat victims were not reporting

the crimes to the police department. This could have been the result of no follow-up contact with the victim after the telephone report was written.

The Census of Population and Housing Report indicated that more than 10,000 of the 13,032 populous of the Coste Verde area were Caucasian. Near the same ratio was reported to be between the ages of eighteen and forty-four. The average income was reported to be more than \$50,000 per household annually and most families owned two cars. The ironic discovery made was the average time a resident leased an apartment where the vehicle burglaries were predominantly happening was only one year. This transitory factor impacted the education of the residents on crime prevention techniques. Another issue this promoted was the lack of continuity one would expect to find in a "neighbor helping neighbor" relationship. When the tenants of the Coste Verde area were asked to identify who their neighbors were or who parked next to them, they were unable to answer the question. One tenant went as far as to suggest he had the right to leave his car phone, pager, computer, and any other item inside his car, and it was up to the police to assure his belongings were safe. Without a doubt, the residents in the Coste Verde area were going to be one of the greatest challenges.

There were several discrepancies noted when an evaluation of the Telephone Report Unit's procedures was conducted. First, the exact location of where vehicle burglaries were occurring was not clearly described on the report. When a burglary occurred within a parking structure with one address, more than two hundred cars could be parked in that same large structure. It was critical in the analysis portion to identify if there were specific locations where thefts were occurring for pattern identification. Second, patrol officers and the Telephone Report Unit did not have a direct line of communication. This helped in preventing the field officers from obtaining information showing the extraordinary amount of vehicle related thefts within Costa Verde.

The identification of where the suspects were striking emanated from the crime cases the Telephone Report Unit was originating. The addresses, with supporting statistics from crime analysis, directed where resources would be used and deployed. In this regard, crime analysis evaluated enough data to pin point the most common addresses where the burglaries were occurring. This considerably reduced the area of concern from twenty-four large apartment complexes down to six.

An additional tool used during the analysis phase was the use of an executive management survey. The survey was hand delivered to the twenty-four property managers in the Coste Verde area. The survey questioned the management companies on a broad spectrum of issues. Some survey questions included issues of security, lease and tenant information, communication techniques between management and residents, and other important data. Analysis of the survey clearly showed a partnership between the property managers and the San Diego Police Department was needed to align their resources to influence the growing problem.

Crime prevention through environmental design was utilized to evaluate the top six complexes specified by crime analysis. This included police officers individually walking the complexes at both daylight and in the hours of darkness. It was found that the complexes invited the burglaries for the following reasons:

- 1) There were three main arteries leading into and out of the area, Interstate 5, Interstate 805 and Highway 52. Access to Interstate 5 from the complexes was approximately 1/8 of a mile to 1/4 of a mile, giving the suspect fast and easy ingress and egress.

- 2) Each property had at least two entrances. Each entrance was unmonitored, unsecured, and gave the suspect(s) an alternate route in case of an unexpected encounter.

3) The majority of the properties did not have an identification program in place to distinguish a tenant's car from a possible suspect's vehicle.

4) Lighting was poor and parking stalls were placed too close together giving the suspect concealment and providing a higher comfort level.

5) Because of the economic make-up of the area, most of the residents' cars were high end Acuras, BMWs, Hondas, and all terrain vehicles such as Jeeps. Statistics indicate that these luxury vehicles are among the top of the nation's lists for vehicle related thefts.

6) Generally, there was no street parking available at the complexes. All vehicle traffic, including guests, had to park on the premises. This helped the suspect(s) drive onto the particular target area undetected, complete the crime, and then leave.

In studying prior arrests, the suspects would drive into the complex and park their own vehicle. They would then walk around the complex on foot and find the particular vehicle they elected to burglarize. Once found, one suspect would commit the crime while a second suspect would act as a "look out." After the crime was complete, the suspects stayed on foot in that complex and looked for another car to burglarize. It was common for as many as twelve vehicle burglaries to be committed in the same complex in a twenty-four-hour period. The suspects did not live in the area and would often drive from other communities more than twenty miles away to commit these crimes.

A few years ago, a suspect apprehension project had been in place in the division. It had a temporary success while the project was in place. Once the team was disbanded due to staffing, the number of crimes increased again.

Random stakeouts generally yield very little success and require a large amount of out-of-service time for officers. This made it imperative that suspect(s) be identified and follow up be conducted on all anonymous tips received by the police department. The Regional Auto Theft Task Force deals mainly with auto thefts. However, it was found that there were related characteristics of vehicle thefts and vehicle burglaries. This was proven true during the suspect(s) identification portion of the analysis.

Additionally, the Regional Auto Theft Task Force had identified one family residing in a home just a few miles from the Coste Verde area. This family had two brothers that were unemployed and in 1996 purchased more than \$150,000 cash in salvage vehicles at the public auction. The vehicles they purchased were mostly Acuras. It just so happened Acuras were one of the top five vehicles being burglarized in the Coste Verde area.

Unfortunately, history had shown that hundreds of suspected stolen car parts were recovered. These parts did not have any identifiable numbers leading investigators back to a specific victim's vehicle. Instead, victims had to prove there were personal points of identification on the particular parts found. This could include stains, gum, or grease. Even the most specific of information obtained from the victims proved to be a test once the litigation portion of the case started. It became apparent that automobile manufacturers need to commence a campaign where the removable parts to automobiles are clearly and permanently identifiable tracing it to the original vehicle from which it came.

## RESPONSE

The target hardening portion of the project was without a doubt the single most important aspect in obtaining permanent results. Patrol officers were assigned to each of the six complexes. Those officers, with additional regular radio call responsibilities, spent hours creating relationships with the property managers. After being advised of the high crime rate, most of the property managers told the officers that they were willing to form a partnership and commence whatever action deemed appropriate to cease the monetary losses. Most of the complexes then implemented neighborhood watch programs and encouraged their tenants to get acquainted with their neighbors. All of the six complexes moved forward with adopting security measures along with correcting the environmental deficiencies.

Some suggestions to correct the environmental deficiencies ranged from increased lighting to repainting the underground parking structures white for brightness. They have also reduced the number of entrances and exits during peak theft times and secured the property from open pedestrian traffic. Nobel Court, the complex that lost \$144,000 in one year, committed to spending more than \$70,000 in security gates and security personnel. Another complex, which had two entrances into its underground parking structure, placed a simple metal bar across one entrance in the evening hours. The other entrance had a guard permanently placed at it. The cost to the property owner was minimal and had dramatic results in decreasing the number of vehicle thefts and burglaries. One other complex placed security bars on the open sections of the parking structure to funnel all traffic in one direction.

With the transitory nature of the residents, victim education came in the form of having the Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol, patrol officers, and private security firms, place handouts on vehicles found unsecured. Property managers were kept up-to-date on the progression of the project. They in turn disseminated the information to their tenants.

Patrol officers and the Retired Senior Volunteer Patrols were directed to frequent the six locations identified through Crime Analysis. The times of the patrols coincided with the information supplied by Crime Analysis as the most active periods for vehicle burglaries.

The Telephone Report Unit received training and subsequently the specific location of the crime was obtained from the victim. Also, the unit began to use a large map of the area. This map was marked whenever a report of a vehicle burglary was received. Patrol officers were able to walk into the unit and identify, by looking at the chart, where the crimes were occurring.

The apprehension portion of the project was an exciting aspect. The Telephone Report Unit would take the initial crime case and provide a copy of the report to a newly formed investigative team.

This team was formed to conduct follow-up investigations with all of the victims. The team consisted of one sworn police officer and eight volunteers. This investigative team concept is ongoing and the officer position is rotated every four months to give personnel experience in investigations and working with volunteers. The team continues to re-contact each of the car burglary victims and re-interview them over the telephone. They arrange with the victims to conduct a search of the vehicle for fingerprints. In the first four months of this operation, the volunteer unit obtained information that resulted in the arrest of six suspects.

Because of the project, the Ngo brothers were arrested for several vehicle theft charges and subsequently, a large sophisticated ring of people committing vehicle burglaries has been dismantled. They were responsible for an extraordinary amount of the thefts that had occurred in the area dating back to 1994. In executing one of the many search warrants, more than \$20,000 in stolen vehicle parts were recovered. The Internal Revenue Service has now opened a tax evasion investigation into the family.

The National Insurance Bureau was contacted and as a result, progress is continuing toward educating automobile manufacturers concerning the necessity of parts identification. One low-cost option discussed is the placing of a non-removable sticker, with the vehicles identification number, on the removable components to an automobile.

A maintenance program has been adopted in the area. It includes officers continuing to have partnerships with the property managers and the community. By doing this, the officers can learn of potential issues that may arise. This is done without a loss of staffing from the command because officers can maintain these relationships while still performing their assigned patrol functions. Having these relationships continue is a key aspect toward obtaining and sustaining permanent results from the project.

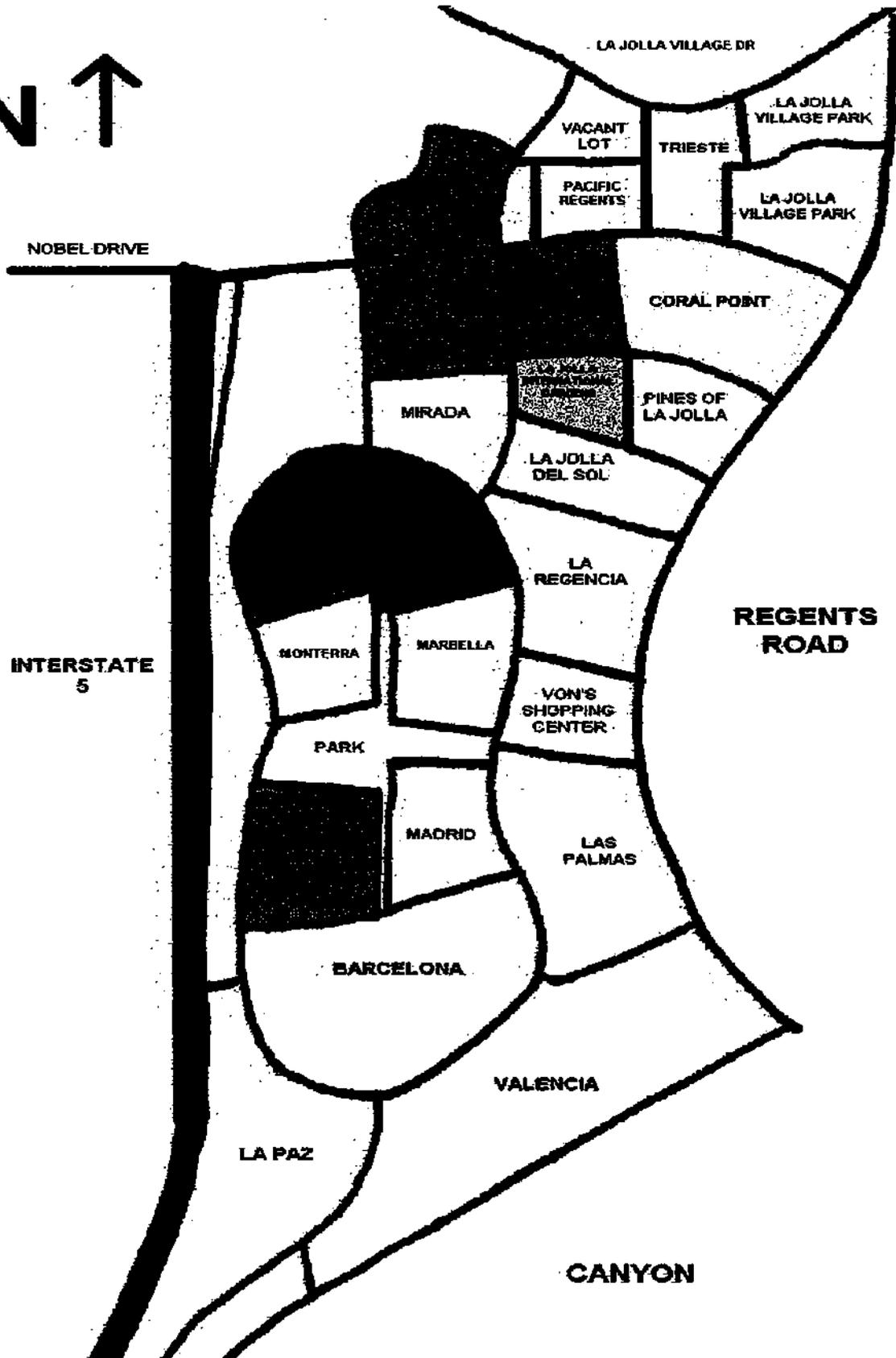
## ASSESSMENT

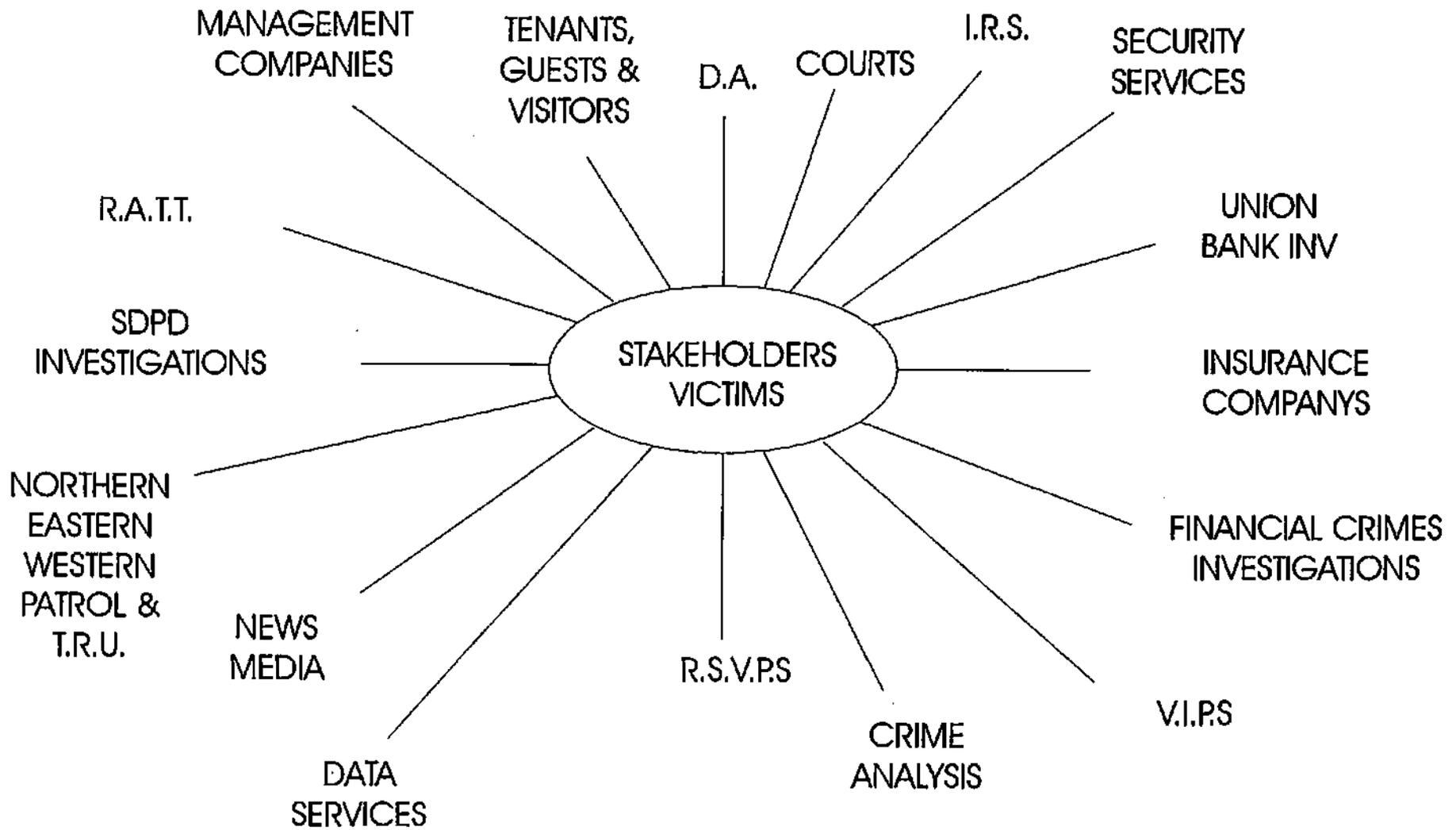
When this project started, the Coste Verde community had suffered a monthly average of 35.2 vehicle burglaries from September of 1996 through January of 1997. After the project had been implemented, the monthly average decreased to 15.8 vehicle burglaries from February 1997 through June of 1997. This resulted in more than a 50% reduction of vehicle burglaries within a

4-month period. In addition, the number of car burglaries decreased more than 45% in the 115 service area and more than 39% in the entire 110 service areas.

The monitoring of this area will be ongoing as complexes continue to install security measures. Monitoring will continue for a one year period from the completion of the security enhancements. Displacement is also being monitored in the surrounding neighborhoods and has not been detected as of this time.

N ↑





**COSTA VERDE AUTO THEFT/CAR PROWL SERIES  
RESIDENTIAL COMPLEX SURVEY**

Name of complex: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Linked to other complex in area? Y  N  If so what complex? \_\_\_\_\_

Management: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

How do you communicate with tenants? News Letter \_\_\_\_\_ Rent notices \_\_\_\_\_ Bulletin board \_\_\_\_\_  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

Condo \_\_\_\_\_ Apartment \_\_\_\_\_ Number of units: \_\_\_\_\_ Approx. Population: \_\_\_\_\_

Lease: Y  N  \_\_\_\_\_ % Rent: Y  N  \_\_\_\_\_ %

Professionals: \_\_\_\_\_ % Students: \_\_\_\_\_ %

Distance to nearest freeway exit: \_\_\_\_\_ entrance: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have security guards? Y  N  If so, name of company: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of guards per shift: \_\_\_\_\_ Days: \_\_\_\_\_ Hours: \_\_\_\_\_

Uniformed? Y  N  Armed? Y  N  Radios? Y  N  Foot patrol? Y  N   
Vehicle patrol? Y  N

Percent of time spent in parking areas: \_\_\_\_\_ %

**PARKING AREAS:**

Garages with doors: \_\_\_\_\_ %

Parking structure: \_\_\_\_\_ %

Parking lot: \_\_\_\_\_ %

Number of entrances: Veh. \_\_\_\_\_ Sec.? Y  N  Ped. \_\_\_\_\_ Sec.? Y  N  Windows \_\_\_\_\_ Sec.? Y  N

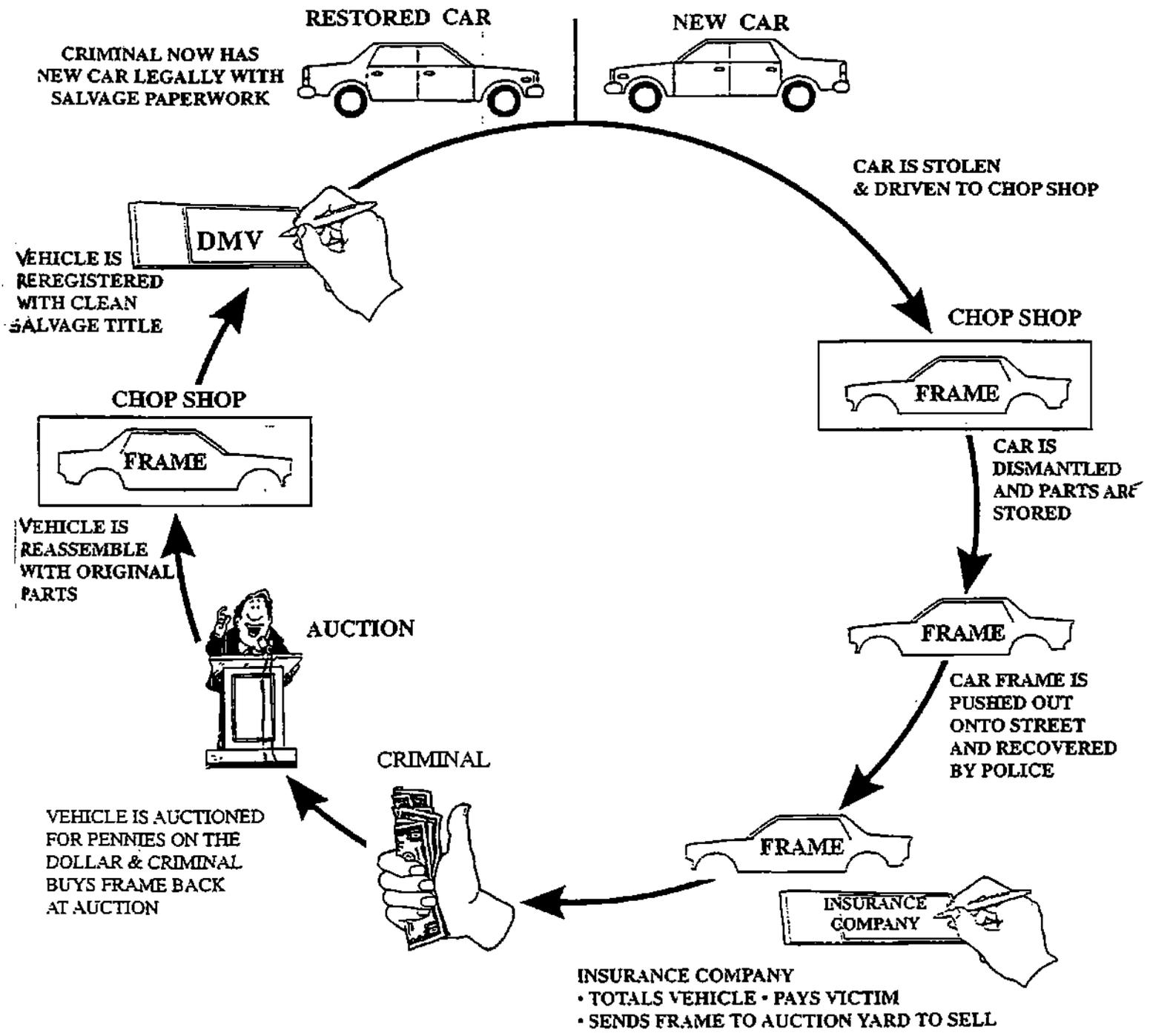
CCTV? Y  N

Gates? Y  N

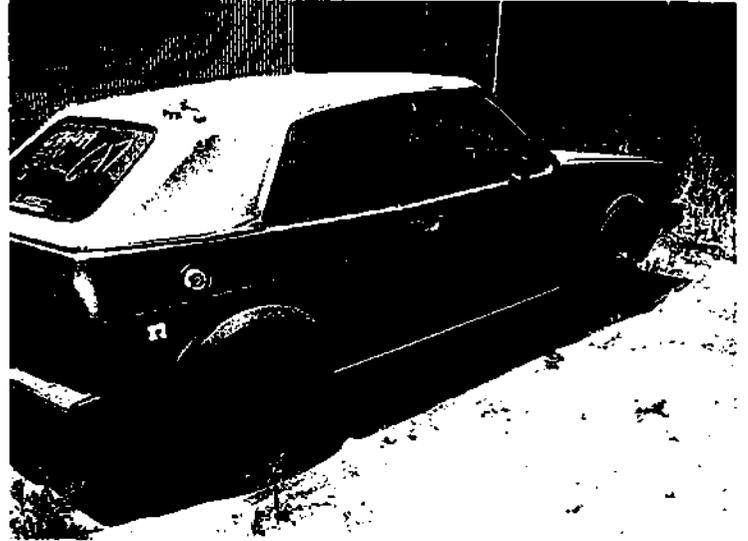
Entry: Mag. Sensor \_\_\_ Remote \_\_\_ Card reader \_\_\_ Pad \_\_\_ Combo. Last changed \_\_\_\_\_

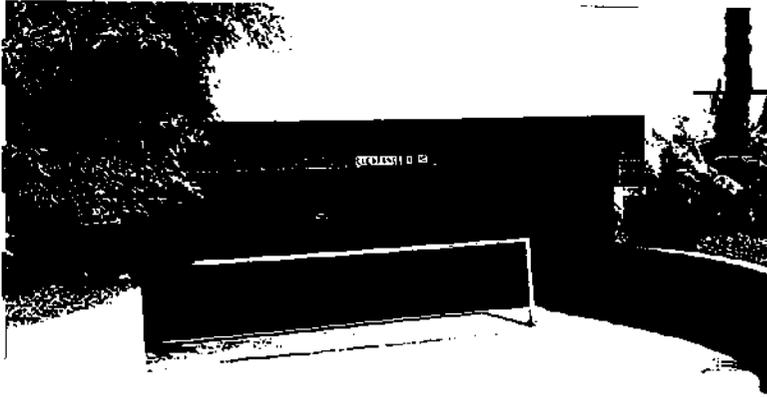
Exit: Mag. Sensor \_\_\_ Remote \_\_\_ Card reader \_\_\_ Pad \_\_\_ Combo. Last changed \_\_\_\_\_

Guest parking? Y  N  If so, inside secured area? Y  No Street parking available? Y  No



**INSURANCE COMPANY**  
 • TOTALS VEHICLE • PAYS VICTIM  
 • SENDS FRAME TO AUCTION YARD TO SELL





# THE SAN DIEGO POLICE DEPARTMENT

## **Vision**

We are committed to working together, within the Department, in a problem solving partnership with communities, government agencies, private groups and individuals to fight crime and improve the quality of life for the people of San Diego.

## **Values**

The principles upon which we base our policing area:

### **\*Human Life**

The protection of human life is our highest priority.

### **\*Crime Fighting**

Our efforts to address neighborhood problems will be based on a Partnership with the community.

### **\*Loyalty**

We will be loyal to the community, to the Department and its members, and to the standards of our profession.

### **\*Fairness**

Our decisions will be based on common sense, and will be balanced, moral, legal and without personal favoritism.

### **\*Ethics**

We will demonstrate integrity and honor in all our actions.

### **\*Valuing People**

We will treat each other with dignity and respect, protecting the rights and well-being of all individuals.

### **\*Open Communication**

We will listen to one another's opinions and concerns.

### **\*Diversity**

We appreciate one another's differences and recognize that our unique skills, knowledge, abilities and backgrounds bring strength and caring to our organization.

## **Mission**

Our mission is to maintain peace and order through the provision of police services that are of the highest quality and responsive to the needs of the community. We will contribute to the safety and security of the community by apprehending those who commit criminal acts, be developing partnerships to prevent, reduce or eliminate neighborhood problems, and by providing police services that are fair, unbiased, judicious, and respectful of the dignity of all individuals.