

ROLLING MEADOWS POLICE DEPARTMENT

Building Community Partnerships to Improve a Neighborhood:

Police Neighborhood Resource Center

SUMMARY

The Problem: Over the course of many years, a section of Rolling Meadows had decayed due to irresponsible or apathetic attitudes. The neighborhood was home to socially and medically indigent people who were under-employed and who had no expectation of success. The area had experienced a steady increase in criminal activity and accounted for a majority of the Police Department's "calls for service" for the entire City. Many of the crimes were gang related and included drug use, drug sales, prostitution, robbery, burglary, and public drinking. We also suspected that more activity was going on that was never reported.

Analysis: The Chief of Police at that time (Gerald Aponte) formed a committee of Officers and Administration to address the problem with both traditional and non-traditional approaches. Statistical analysis and a door to door campaign were launched to determine what the needs of the population were.

The results indicated that parents who were employed often worked long hours leaving young children home alone after school. It became evident that a large number of residents (either unemployed or home from school) were loitering on the property thus

creating a criminal element that was keeping the law-abiding residents from affecting their environment in a positive manner.

Response: Two apartment units were transformed into a Police Department sub-station. The sub-station was identified as the Police Neighborhood Resource Center (PNRC) and staffed by two Police Officers, one Supervisor, and a Social Worker. A zero tolerance policy for all crimes that occurred in the area was immediately implemented. Once a strong police presence was established, other community partnerships were created to address the area's social problems. Some of the first partnerships included the Public Library, School District 214 (our local high school district), and School District 15 (our local elementary school district).

Assessment: The impact of the project is both tangible and implied. The calls for police service initially rose yet crime related reports have dropped. People are reporting suspicious activity and nuisance behavior while the evidence of gang activity, personal crimes, and property crimes has dropped dramatically.

Education of children and adults in remedial and after school tutoring courses has brought an increase in school attendance, a higher incidence of graduation from high school and a decrease in unemployment. English literacy has risen, as has citizenship, because of courses directed at those adults who wish to improve their lifestyle.

SCANNING

The steady decay of a neighborhood located in the southern section of our town was creating increased frequency and severity of crime. The entire neighborhood had a poor reputation and real estate values were depressed. The problem that was present did not occur in a short period, it had evolved over the years and continued to build upon itself. The neighborhood consisted of two apartment complex developments and one condominium development in close proximity to each other. The three developments involved were Coachlight Condominiums (300 units), East Park Apartments (274 units), and Evergreen Apartments (64 units). During the late 1980's, a disturbing criminal pattern was developing in the area according to statistical data and patrol officer reports.

- In **1987**, 47% of the department's total calls for service originated from the area. There were 2,037 arrests made and 17,632 criminal incidents reported.
- In **1988**, 52% of the department's total calls for service originated from the area. There were 2,146 arrests made and 19,316 criminal incidents reported.
- In **1989**, 52% of the department's total calls for service originated from the area. There were 1,888 arrests made and 20,568 criminal incidents reported.

Within the first few months of 1990, the Police Department responded to three incidents of mob violence including more than 200 people, some fighting with baseball bats. During those three incidents, the police arrested 12 people for public intoxication, 12 people for battery, and 2 others for weapons charges. Within the first six months of

1990, the Department had made 121 felony arrests in the area. Officers reported that individuals within the area would routinely throw beer bottles or other solid objects at patrol vehicles moving in the complexes. The Department purchased riot gear for every officer and it became a requirement for them to carry the equipment while on patrol. Shift supervisors began assigning multiple units to every service call, both for officer safety purposes and to minimize incidents of squad vandalism. Property managers from all three complexes had noticed an influx of gang graffiti, other vandalism, and littering.

The apartment Managers, Police Administrators, and Officers believed that the increased activity was due to a combination of three area characteristics. First, there were limited activities for adolescents who were home from school. Second, there was a large amount of unemployed or underemployed people who engaged in public consumption of alcohol. Third, there were residents with extensive criminal backgrounds and/or gang affiliations living on the properties.

ANALYSIS

The Chief of Police formed a committee of Officers and Administration to research the causes of the problem and to develop a course of action. The committee worked together with property managers and social workers (who were bi-lingual) in several community meetings as well as a door to door campaign. A statistical analysis of the calls for service in the area was prepared and the results were then compared to the information gathered by the citizen survey. An overall view of the neighborhood began to unfold.

There had been an influx of Spanish speaking persons moving into the neighborhood. These individuals had spent a majority of their lives in a different culture (primarily Mexico and Central America). As the new residents moved in, they continued to behave in a manner that had been appropriate for them in their previous environment.

These residents were concerned about their safety and a growing number of them had been witnessing a proliferation of drugs, gang-related crimes, and other nuisance crimes (loud music, fighting, and vandalism). Residents reported that they wanted a stable and peaceful neighborhood, and feared for their safety as well as their children, homes, and possessions. The public drinking, prostitution, and gang activity intimidated people who may have wanted to keep their neighborhood clean and neat. These same residents desperately wanted to raise their standard of living through better employment, education, and health.

The new residents often feared the police since they came from an oppressive government or they believed that the police would send them back to their previous country of residence. That fear caused an enormous obstacle, getting the residents who wished to become part of mainstream suburban Rolling Meadows to report crime and work together with the police on a long term solution.

Increased patrol did not lessen the sense of fear in the residents nor did it encourage cooperation. In fact, the Department had stepped up patrols each year, but the problems continued. In the first six months of 1990, the Police Department assigned a special

patrol unit, deployed two plainclothes officers, and two hire-back officers (whose salaries were paid for by the property owners) dedicated solely to the area. This strategy resulted in numerous arrests, but we also learned that not all-inappropriate conduct was illegal.

Some of the nuisance behaviors included drinking in public, large gatherings where people would make comments to passing motorists or playing field games in parking lots. At the time, there were no laws or ordinances in place to control those activities. Another common problem was lack of parental supervision for children and teens that had little or no productive social activities.

The area itself was not conducive to educational, social, or sporting events. There was limited space available; no meeting rooms or clubhouse, few playgrounds or open fields those residents had access to. Large numbers of people frequented the few available areas and residents did not feel safe within them.

RESPONSE

The immediate response was to initiate a zero tolerance policy for any crimes that occurred in the area. In order for that to be effective, the Police Department had to make others aware of our intention. We contacted the local courthouse, Assistant States Attorneys office, and the Chief Judge. It was important for us to explain to them why they would see an increase in criminal cases at the courthouse. We also met our City Prosecutor and requested they seek convictions on all charges stemming from criminal

activity in the service area. We had expected that by arresting known offenders we might force them to keep their activity out of town or at least curb their behavior.

By targeting the known criminals or criminal activity, we had hoped that it would relay the message that there are serious consequences to illegal activity. Through this message, we had hoped that borderline gang members might opt out or that gang recruitment would slow.

While arrests and heavy patrol activity were taking place, we needed to establish and maintain a relationship with the Management of the three complexes and the Local School Districts. We approached the relationship as a partnership rather than seeking assistance for the Police Department. We (the Police) could not have a positive, lasting effect on the area without the neighborhood being involved.

In November of 1990, East Park Apartments donated two of their units for a Police sub-station. We identified the sub-station as the Police Neighborhood Resource Center (PNRC). The name was important because we wanted people to know that the Police were on site and that we were working with other agencies to be a resource to improve their community.

Our research showed that the three major problems in the neighborhood were a high rate of crime, lack of education, and poor health care. Consequently, some of our early partners included the Public Library, School District 214 (our local high school district),

School District 15 (our local elementary school district), and Northwest Community Hospital (NWCH). We learned by speaking with the hospital that they had extremely high costs for emergency room operations, due to some individuals coming in for non-emergency reasons. We also learned that mothers were not receiving the proper pre-natal care and infants were not receiving the proper immunizations.

Through the efforts of NWCH and the other partners, the City purchased an entire building at East Park Apartments consisting of 10 units. The building was remodeled to accommodate the partners and their needs.

Our objectives were simple; we wanted to work on stopping the immediate threat of violence while at the same time establish a relationship with the residents, forging their trust and cooperation. Our original mission statement for the center was "To prevent and reverse cycles of deterioration that invite crime, decay, and apathy." All of the partners adopted the mission statement and altered their programs to meet our objectives. Over time, we noticed significant changes in the area that created new demands on the PNRC. New partnerships were formed and new programs were designed and implemented. As our objectives have changed, so has our mission statement. Currently it is "To enhance the quality of life through empowerment, coordination of resources, and the promotion of education and health among under-served residents."

Partners and their activities include:

Law Enforcement Services

The Police Department continues to take an active interest in the quality of life for the residents of the service population. We have reduced the number of officers staffing the PNRC from two Police Officers and one Supervisor to one Officer. The Officer is assigned to the PNRC on a full-time basis with support from all units of the Department.

The PNRC officer's duties include the rudiments of law enforcement such as patrolling the area and enforcing state and city laws. Other duties include but are not limited to:

- Initiate, develop, implement, and follow through with solutions to specific problems that are identified or brought to our attention through the community via action plans;
- Encourage citizens to participate in the problem solving process;
- Gather intelligence on criminal activity within the PNRC service area;
- Develop and implement programs for public awareness and public education in crime prevention methods;
- Develop collaborative relationships among individuals, and organizations necessary to jointly solve crime related problems;
- Educate citizens of the police role in the community;
- Initiate and maintain programs in the youth area that will instill community involvement activities in the preteen and teenage group;
- Assist with the coordination of the summer youth programs;
- Act as liaison with all of the PNRC partners, social service agencies, and law enforcement; and

- Conduct business and residential crime prevention security programs, which will deter criminal activity.

The Department has integrated aspects of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design to address the areas of concern raised by the residents. Landscaping, lighting, and pedestrian gathering areas have been reviewed. Many changes were made to assist in reducing the opportunity for crime. Officers use a two-pronged action plan to target instances of gang activity, other criminal activity including narcotics and battery, juvenile related crimes, and public drinking. Officers take an aggressive approach in the enforcement of laws and ordinances. Officer's follow-up with offenders through referral services available at the PNRC. Officers make one-to-one contact with at-risk youth and offer alternatives to criminal activity. These include mentoring and summer programs including basketball, soccer, field trips, scouting, and the Police Explorer Program.

Local families are offered new infant and child car seats at reduced cost through the center. Courses are provided once a month by an officer **certified** in the car seat training protocol. Parents receive the seat appropriate for their child and are given specific instructions on how to safely install and insure the seat function appropriately.

Holiday Activities

The Stadium Sports Club (a local business) has sponsored a Thanksgiving Dinner for needy families in the area. With transportation assistance provided by the Rolling Meadows Park District, close to 100 people have enjoyed traditional turkey dinners.

The Department's annual Holiday Gift-Giveaway Program takes place in December. Citizens and Police Officers volunteer their time to purchase, wrap, and handout gifts to over 650 children. This program remains one of the most popular events that the PNRC and Police Department sponsor.

Education Services

William Rainey Harper College

The college employs six instructors and two teacher assistants for classes offered on site. The Adult Educational Development Department offers free English as Second Language (ESL) courses to residents. Over 850 students attended classes during the year.

A further refinement of the PNRC involved helping residents with jobs and careers. Using a special Illinois State Board of Education partnership career grant in 1996, Harper College staff established a system to provide career development change options. On-site bilingual (Spanish) career advising was established along with the Work Force on-line System, (later replaced by America's Job Bank) a job search database which maintains a neighborhood link to the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES). Through the system, residents have on-site access to approximately 6,000 open and active job listings registered with the IDES office. PNRC staff assists with identification of residents in need of career advising and with promotion of publicity for lifelong educational goals. In 1997, a Career Coop grant allowed for the further development of career activities at the PNRC. No charge childcare on site alleviates the strain and cost

for the many immigrant students and their families as they seek to improve language skills and living standards.

School District 15

Students from Willow Bend receive daily assistance at The Homework and Tutoring Center. Approximately 20 children benefit from the program. Two bilingual teachers and one assistant staff the center. The school district also provides a three-month instruction program for immigrant children, new to the district, to help them adjust to the area.

High School District 214

GED classes in the Spanish language continue to be in great demand at the PNR. Maximum enrollment is met each time classes are offered and a waiting list is maintained for the next session for new students.

The District also provides workshops and outreach regarding immigrant needs and issues. Services assist with areas such as, basic economic skills, government benefits, visa, and citizenship information.

Early Childhood Services

Staff from Clearbrook provides on-site development classes for children age's birth - five (pre-kindergarten) through the LEKOTEK program. Classes include developmentally appropriate goals for play and socialization, including fine and gross motor play, as well

as social, creative and free play. Skill development, creative learning, literacy and school readiness is emphasized in the classes for older children.

Families with children are also able to receive The Early Childhood Development Enrichment Center (ECDEC) services. The Even Start Program offers intervention services for families with children birth through three years, providing development education, **parent/child** interaction activities, home visits, and parent support groups.

Rolling Meadows Public Library

La Biblioteca del Centro (a **small** library inside the **PNRC**) continues to draw high numbers of residents to the facility for books, videos, and reference help. The bilingual librarian has been vital in orienting and assisting neighborhood residents in the many resources available to them through the larger library system. Over 21,000 items are checked out from the Biblioteca del Centro during the year. The summer reading program is also a great success with nearly 50 children taking part in the learning program.

Health Services

Northwest Community Hospital

Twenty-seven doctors, forty-two nurses, and support staff volunteer their services on site at the Neighborhood Health Resource Center during the year. Physicians attending patients at the center specialized in areas such as internal medicine, gynecology, and pediatrics. Numerous physicians provide pro bono services through specialized referrals at other office locations.

The clinic staff averages over 2,500 cases a year. A depression education and prevention project is also being conducted through the clinic in conjunction with Northern Illinois University and Shelter Inc.'s women's group.

CEDA/WIC operate an active office from the PNR. The nutrition and development education program is available to pregnant women, mothers, and children up to age five. An average caseload of 350 families receives food and nutrition aid from the site that is open twice weekly.

Social Services

The Community Action Domestic Violence Project

This innovative project in partnership continues to actively service families throughout Rolling Meadows who have experienced or witnessed violence. The Reaching Out To Kids Program was added to compliment and enhance the already operating programs for adults involved in violent situations. A part-time social worker provides direct services for families and their children. Some of the services provided are crisis intervention, educational seminars, advocacy (assisting people in obtaining orders of protection), counseling for victims and offender, and referrals to outside agencies such as shelters and legal services.

The Salvation Army

The organization supports several other partnership programs financially and with volunteers. It supplies additional professional counseling for individuals, families, and children. In addition, the Salvation Army can provide food, clothing, and off site counseling referrals.

Palatine Township Senior Citizens Council

A bilingual outreach worker provides on-site services one day a week. Among the interventions available to the elderly are counseling, service linkage and support group, among others.

Rolling Meadows Park District

The park district provides an eight-week summer playground program that serves approximately 130 children. The park district also provides playing fields for organized sporting activities and buses for special events and field trips.

Direct Service

The PNRC provides direct services throughout the year for short-term counseling, employment referrals, and other needs. Full-time and part-time bilingual Social Workers offers direct service counseling and case intervention.

Management for the apartment complexes provides the Police Department with information on incidents that occur in the complexes that may not have been reported.

Management also refers individuals to the services that are provided by the Police Department and our partners through the PNRC.

By being involved in community events and including the community in our efforts, we are able to provide quality services that address the needs of the community.

ASSESSMENT

The employees, volunteers, and our partners have continuously evaluated the Police Neighborhood Resource Center project. Patrol Officers working in the area have assisted with the identification of needs and problems, as well as, creating, developing and implementing programs. The door to door campaign that was conducted in 1989 was repeated in 1994, 1998, and 2000. The PNRC officer continually meets with the neighborhood's property managers, Building and Zoning officials, and the Health Inspector as part of his assigned duties.

We realized early on that we needed to monitor the area to determine what types of problems and crimes were occurring and what effects our efforts were producing. The Department's Crime Analysis, Communication, and Investigation units collaborated to develop a code system that allows for tracking of crimes and calls for service within the three complex area. The system contains four hundred and seventy four categories and compares current and past statistics to produce a percentage of change. Once the code system was in place, we had the ability to analyze the calls for service (including assistance calls, nuisance calls, information, and crimes) and any period of our choice

(days, weeks, years, **etc.**). Supervisors and Investigators are able to identify crime patterns as they unfold. The statistics for any given year are then included with the PNRC Annual Report, which is used to make adjustments in the program.

Along with department based analysis and statistic gathering we have taken advantage of studies conducted by the PNRC partners. The center's partnership with William Rainey Harper College provided information on research projects being conducted by local Universities. In the summer of 2001, the PNRC joined with Michael T. Willis and Cheryl Wright Hazek from Aurora University to survey the residents of East Park Apartments, Coach Lite Condominiums, and Evergreen Apartments. The survey was designed to profile the residents who use the PNRC services, and evaluate the specific services being offered.

The survey revealed that the majority of residents live with multiple family members consisting of adults and children, **notwithstanding** the nuclear family. The majorities of residents work full time and are unable to afford health insurance through their employer. Consequently, most residents reported that they used the health clinic more than any other service. The primary services utilized are for general health checkups, physicals, and immunizations. The major issues shared by residents were that the health clinic needs to provide longer hours, needs to be open on weekends, and increase the number of referrals.

We discovered that most of our residents had learned about the Police Department and the many city services that are available to them through the PNRC. This survey also revealed that the major concerns shared by residents are with health care issues and not the fear of crime. We are now in the process of analyzing the reduction of crime rates and fear of crime in the area for future project implications.

All of our research has shown that after twelve years of operation, employment in the neighborhood is high (98%), crime has dropped by over 50%, reports of nuisances and ordinance violations have increased (people are now calling the police to report occurrences and events they were previously unreported), children are succeeding in school, and the neighborhood property values have increased dramatically. The program has had a positive impact on the reputation on the City of Rolling Meadows and furthers the notion that the community itself is in the best position to solve problems associated with decay and irresponsible or apathetic attitudes.

What we have been able to accomplish at the PNRC was done by implementing simple strategies designed to create open communication and cooperation among residents, the police, and the community. A constant challenge in law enforcement is reliable information gathering. The positive gains that we have seen in the area of the PNRC are a direct result of individuals forming a partnership in order to protect their neighborhood.

The tactics and programs that have been implemented at the PNRC have worked well for us and have provided a solid foundation on which we plan to build stronger relationships.

Other Police Departments may benefit from adopting similar programs or dedicating officers to high crime areas, as we did. In fact, several neighboring law enforcement agencies have toured the PNRC and have developed similar facilities.

The programs and services that have been successful were created specifically to address problems common to an area of Rolling Meadows. The project was thought out and all City Officials and Departments have supported the project throughout its existence. We have developed a strong understanding of the citizen concerns and criminal activity in the community. Consequently, we have formed partnerships with multiple agencies that are able to assist us in our established mission.

Any law enforcement agency planning to create a sub-station would benefit from extensive crime analysis and surveying of the area. They should also form partnerships with agencies that can successfully deal with existing problems. Finally, analysis of the program and area should be conducted regularly to ensure progress.

One thing that we have learned repeatedly is that certain situations call for creative and sometimes unconventional methods.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

Departmental training was the first step. All training started "in house" and was conducted by the Chief of Police in conjunction with outside resources. Training included the basic definition of community policing which led to a change from traditional patrol procedures and a redefining of the roles of every unit and employee.

Several sub-committees were formed including:

- EVALUATIONS - Mission: Develop a suitable evaluation that accounts for problem recognition and attempts to solve problems in a quantitative manner in addition to current work practices.
- SUPERVISOR TRAINING - Mission: Develop a recommendation for training supervisors in areas that will help them understand how to manage and support police officers in terms of POP/PSP.
- DEPLOYMENT - Mission: Develop a strategy to provide the police officer with the time needed to interact in his beat or service area while affording the department managers the flexibility to meet workload demands.
- GENERAL TRAINING - Mission: Develop a process to train both civilians and police officers in the facets of Community and Problem Oriented Policing.
- ASSESSING AGENCIES - Mission: Determine how the model of Problem Solving Policing in Rolling Meadows will be affected by internal and external influences (e.g. training, structure, evaluations, and volunteerism).

- VOLUNTEERISM - Mission: Develop a strategy to create a foundation of volunteers to assist the department in the delivery of public safety and problem solving services.

We continue to involve our local government and by stating our intentions and seeking their input, we gained immediate support. Then they did some work for us in relaying our intentions to their constituents. The City approved a budget increase of \$180,000.00 for the PNRC and State grants have assisted in dealing with expenditures. Also, the partners created their own separate budgets to fund their projects.

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Building from the ashes: the Rolling Meadows story

COPS WHO CARE

by Patricia Hughes

'Fire guts units at East Park complex,' blazes the headline. Dramatic photos of firefighters and a burning two-story apartment building spotlight a possible tragedy in the making.

DATELINE July 18, 1991:

The *Daily Herald's* report led off with the following paragraph: "East Park Apartments in Rolling Meadows, home of the city's innovative neighborhood crime-fighting program, was the scene of a major fire Monday afternoon that destroyed 16 apartments and left more than 50 people in need of assistance."

But East Park Apartments was also the scene of a unique crime fighting operation, the Police Neighborhood Resource Center.

Police Chief Gerald Aponte, Commander Tim Lonergan, Officers Anthony Luzin and Terry Cappelano, had built a team of police officers, educators and community volunteers who were working to create a better quality of life for the Hispanic neighborhood.

The Police Neighborhood Resource Center (PNRC) located at the East Park complex, was not involved in the flames, and officers responded within minutes to assist residents deal with confusion and distress after the fire was brought under control.

Police officers searched and counted affected residents, and with the help of the American Red Cross, brought them food and clothing. Most East Park residents speak only Spanish, so PNRC officers acted as translators.

"The community's response was excellent," said Commander Tim Lonergan. "The Rolling Meadows community had heard

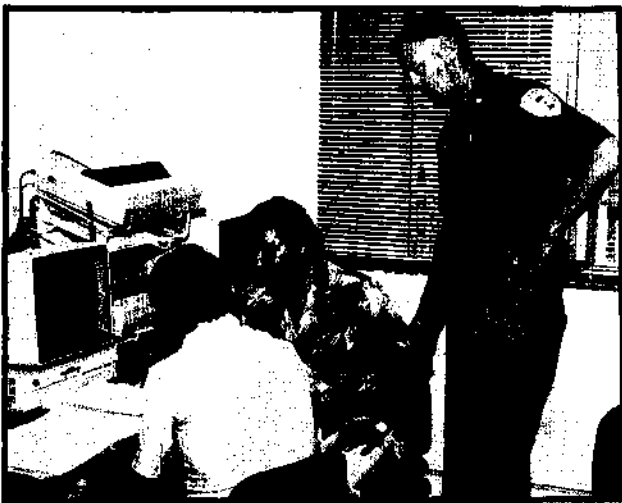
so much about the program (PNRC) and we'd had so much good media coverage that everybody who had been burned out was back in housing, with replacements for their losses, by Thursday evening."



Lonergan says the Anglo community's immediate response to its East Park neighbors during time of trauma was very gratifying. He feels publicity about the Police Neighborhood Resource Center programs was largely responsible for the strong community-wide support that followed the fire.

Police-led programs to contain and reduce gang activity, promote education and provide opportunity for the newcomers have brought Rolling Meadows high praise and media attention. They have also, over a period of about three years, built a better community.

The amazing community support for the Hispanic families, who were re-established almost before the ashes cooled, shows the positive effect that caring persons have upon their community.



Background: Mid-1989

Rolling Meadows' police zero tolerance program to combat gangs in the area began in August 1989. In the early stages, two officers were assigned to patrol the area bound by Central Road on the north, Weber Drive on the east, Algonquin Road on the south and Salt Creek on the west. (see map)

In the midst of this area sat East Park Apartments, a low-rent, worn-looking housing complex, separated from newer condos and nearby houses by walls. There was little recreation for East Park youth, nothing much to do except play handball against the wall, hang out, or get involved in gangs.

Along with other Northwest Chicago suburbs, Rolling Meadows was facing an influx of different cultural groups.

"This . . . cultural explosion . . . is now so visible that people are recognizing it," Lonergan was quoted by a local newspaper in September 1989. "When you have all those cultures present, the good and the bad of all of them are going to be seen, and the bad elements include the gangs."

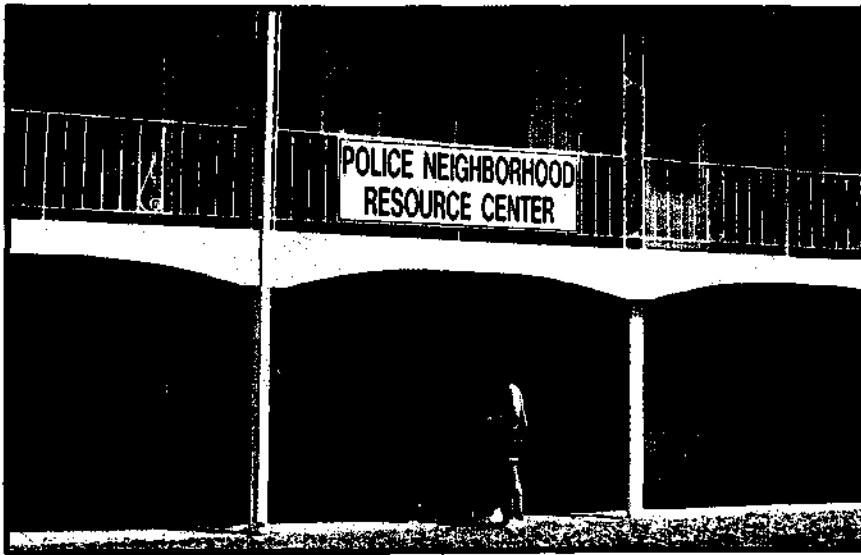


The zero tolerance response to gang symbol graffiti that had begun appearing in the East Park Apartments area was immediate. Police had to move quickly, before gang leaders could develop a financial lifeline and establish a power structure.

But Chief Aponte, Commander Lonergan and their officers knew this response would not, by itself, solve the problem or eliminate the conditions that could breed a dangerous, volatile climate in their community.

They convinced the City Council to approve about \$68,000 in funding for a 6-month trial program: the Police Neighborhood Resource Center. They planned for PNRC to maintain a constant police presence in the community, to help and work with the residents, instead of just sending in officers to respond to trouble. PNRC's proposals involved integrating Hispanics from the southeast section of the city into the mainstream Rolling Meadows community, including East Park Apartments, Coach Light Condominiums and the Park Meadows Apartments.

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Ashes Cont'd

Mayor William Ahrens and the city council gave strong support to PNRC, and the money needed for the first six months was gleaned from other budgets. Five departments trimmed their budgets in order to support PNRC: Finance/Administration, Health, Police, Building & Zoning and Public Works. Interim City Manager Rod Blane said, "We all agreed that this (was) a really critical issue."

PNRC's initial program included a bilingual social worker, one sergeant and two patrolmen. With Harper College, Community Consolidated School District 15 and Township High School District 214 taking part, PNRC provided educational/tutoring programs for children and adults. By January of 1991, classes included GED equivalency, English as a second language and life skills workshops. The complex also housed an after school homework center through Willow Bend Elementary School.-.

Harper College's free courses in English provided newcomers with avenues to the mainstream community, work, and higher education. GED courses qualify them for better jobs.

Wayne L. Shoquist, then president of the Coach Light Condominium Association may have summed up the community's feeling about Rolling Meadows' police programs.

In his September 20, 1989 letter to Mayor Ahrens, Shoquist says:

"The RM police department has been absolutely outstanding in their efforts to stabilize our neighborhood area. Not only have they opened the lines of communication with East Park residents, but they also have put everyone on alert that the department will not

tolerate offenses from anyone - Coach Lighters included.

"When I see dedication as I have seen in the last few weeks, I am impressed. We just wanted you to know the police are on the job...and doing it well. My only concern now is what happens when the current force can no longer provide the intense coverage that has been necessary to contain and improve the area. Will we return to business as usual? . . ."

"Business as usual" in Rolling Meadows is not likely to happen; not as long as the community has cops who care.

Kids drop in, play video games, and hang out with the good guys. Once in a while, on a late afternoon, you can't get hold of Commander Lonergan or the other officers, because they're managing or coaching a ball game. Gang activity has not prospered.

Sometimes, as in Rolling Meadows, the most effective police work begins when a chief or an officer hangs up his jacket, badge and weapon, and digs into community life. This community and its caring police have been literally and symbolically building from the ashes.

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Ten years ago, a small office opened in a poor, crime-ridden area in a small suburb often referred to as Rolling Ghettoes. Today, crime is down, employment is up and the ghetto is gone.



Rolling Meadows' program offering help to new residents now is nationally recognized. The PNRG offers newcomers the health, job and language help they need to realistically begin their pursuit of the American dream.

Rolling Meadows' office for immigrants, located in the Rolling Meadows Public Library, offers classes for new residents. The classes are taught by a team of volunteers, including the author, who has been teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for many years. The classes help immigrants learn the English language, understand American culture, and access social services.

A hub of hope, help

Rolling Meadows' office for immigrants offers newcomers the tools they need to realistically begin their pursuit of the American dream.

14 years later, immigrants find PNRG and a piece of the pie

...the power of the American dream. My daughter is 12. I have an apartment. A B-I-D-B-F-G."

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Nicolas Escobar left his native Mexico in 1979 seeking a better life. He had heard of Rolling Meadows. He wound up in a Chicago apartment with his brother working a Holiday Inn and trying to make enough to get out on his own. It took him 14 years to find his way to Cook County Condominiums in Rolling Meadows. Once there, it didn't take very long to finally acquire the resources he needed to actually achieve his dream. In 1992 the city's...

...the power of the American dream. My daughter is 12. I have an apartment. A B-I-D-B-F-G."

Escutia: Family found help at center

Continued from Page 1

"When she had to make her doctor's appointment or speak to teachers, she always asked me to do it," Escutia said. "Right now she goes to doctors and she goes to school for the children. And right now she's using the big library."

The Spanish-language library branch at the PNRC, called the Gateway Biblioteca, introduced Maria to the resources available at the Rolling Meadows Library, which she now patronizes near the family's home on Dove Court.

"We are part of the community," Escutia said. "We really like the community, because even though we don't have family here, the people at the church are like family and we have many friends we made at the PNRC."

It was actually a string of lucky had luck that brought Escutia to Rolling Meadows and the PNRC.

After arriving from Mexico, Escutia shared an apartment with his brother for 10 years in Chicago. Escutia moved into his brother's new home in Bensenville in 1988, but still didn't have a home of his home.

"We really like the community, because even though we don't have family here, the people at the church are like family and we have many friends we made at the PNRC."

Nicolas Escutia

Escutia moved again to share living space with a cousin in Bensenville, but then decided to look for an apartment. He had met Maria during a trip home to Mexico, and he brought her back with him to the United States after they married in 1990.

"I was looking for an apartment, and for some reason, I was not able to get one," Escutia said. "It was always no credit and not enough money to pay the rent because I had my first child and not much money."

Then Escutia saw an advertisement for Coach Light Condominiums in the newspaper.

"I moved in 1992, and instead of me paying just rent, I was gaining ed-

ucation, so that helped me save money to buy a house," Escutia said. "After a while, I thought those people that don't want to rent me an apartment, because if they did, maybe I would still be paying rent."

Escutia's family was able to get free child care for their two children at the PNRC while Maria took free English classes.

The PNRC clinic run by Northwest Community Healthcare provided needed immunizations so the Escutia's children could go to school, and the family found a support network of other Mexican families.

"A lot of people that I know there, they have been there a while, so a lot of them are moving out of that area too," Escutia said. "I know already these families that moved at almost the same time that we did."

Escutia continues to return to the PNRC to volunteer and give back to the community that did so much for him, he said.

"I think I will go back because I like what they're doing there," Escutia said. "I think that most of the people that are here are just trying to do the same thing we did, just trying to improve their lives."



Rolling Meadows officer Terry Cappelen shows some Hanover Park visitors, Trustee Lawrence Pikora, Sgt. Dan Driscoll and Lt. Dean Norman, around the Police Neighborhood Resource Center in the East Park Apartments in Rolling Meadows.

Daily Herald Photo/Bob Chwedyc

Village eyes center to quell complex trouble

BY ANNE SCHMITT
Daily Herald Staff Writer

When Hanover Park police looked at the Rolling Meadows East Park Apartment complex, they saw some similarities and differences to the village's own Glendale Terrace apartments.

The size and the number of reported crimes in the Glendale Terrace apartments fell below the Rolling Meadows complex at its worst. But the two largely Hispanic islands mirror each other in how their cultural differences are at odds with the surrounding Northwest suburbs.

So now, with an eye to the early success of the six-month-old Police Neighborhood Resource Center in

Rolling Meadows, Hanover Park is laying the groundwork to establish a community center in its own troubled neighborhood.

A neighborhood resource center would link the residents with community, educational and social services, including a food pantry, English language classes and health education.

The primary thrust of a Hanover Park resource center would be to help the residents — many of whom may not know English or local laws — integrate into the surrounding community and, along the way, improve relations with police and local government.

"That's one of the things we want to cultivate is the trust in the police and the government — that

we're here to help them and take care of the people who don't want to conform," police Cmdr. Gary Altergott said.

What police encounter now is a higher rate of crime than in the rest of the village. In 1990, the apartment complex claimed several major crimes, including one attempted murder. Police also are aware of drug dealers living in the complex and the existence of gang graffiti, Altergott said.

More common problems, he said, are large groups of men drinking in public areas, domestic violence and loud music.

That description sounds familiar to Rolling Meadows police, who remember fights — even riots — at the East Park apartments.

East Park complex beats the heat in a resource center bridges residents to community

By Christopher Dawan
Special to the Journal

East Park's first night erupted last summer in the section of the other side of the city of Rolling Meadows. A day section of the Northside suburbs caught the attention of surrounding communities. "Gang" and "mob" activity spread over the area. When police broadcast the news in the area, East Park apartments had gotten the reputation for the place to go when the weather heated up and tempers flared.

A year later, eyes are turning to the area again. But this time, the attention is not one of fear, but one of cooperation. To understand that not-so-subtle change, you have to take a long look at the city's Police Resource and Resource Center. The center believes the simplicity of the operation can have an impact in the apartment

complex, taking over three apartments and are available at least 12 hours a day. And the police, three school districts, social service agencies, the park district, the library and more than 60 area businesses and organizations lay some blame to this social experiment. "This particular program is exactly what it says — a resource center," said Hanover Park Police Chief Robert Sauer, who is impressed enough with Rolling Meadows' results to launch a similar program. "Not only are the police in an area, but they bring along with them every resource they possibly can to help solve what is really the cause of the problem."

In the case of Rolling Meadows, that meant helping a predominantly Spanish-speaking population, including relatively recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America. So when Rolling Meadows Police Chief Gerald Aponte put out a call for assistance six months ago, it was to agencies not directly related to police enforcement.

"We were thinking about the city coming in with resources on a limited basis, the police department being down there trying to bridge the gap between the city and the special population base," he said.

What the officers confronted was an area that had in recent years become a haven for out-of-control gangs, drug dealing and organized crime activity. New owners purchased the apartment property and immediately started making changes such as kicking out known gang members and removing graffiti.

But that wasn't enough. The project needed a stronger push.



Young and old alike stop to chat with a Rolling Meadows police officer as he makes his rounds through the East Park apartment complex. Daily Herald Photo/ Bob Chweddyk

By the time Aponte proposed the PNRC plan to city officials, nearly every agency in the city was familiar with the problem and offered to help.

"As time went by, the school systems and the property owners really got involved," he said. "The cooperation we got was phenomenal."

While most people involved with the PNRC, including Aponte, are saying the program's true test will come over the next few months as rising temperatures force people out of their apartments and into the streets and parking lots, few can contest that myriad changes already have taken place since December.

Fewer crimes are being re-

ported in that quadrant of the city, which includes the area between Central to Algonquin roads and Weber Drive to Ball Creek Parkway and includes near arrests Jan. 1 through June 1 in 1990 totaled 121, but dropped to 75 for the same period in 1991.

The owners of East Park Apartments, the largest of three rental complexes in the city's highest income sector, donated the use of three apartments as well as renovating the buildings.

Three school districts — elementary, high school and college — began providing free classes specifically suited to the residents.

A bilingual social worker hired

See PNRC on Page 4



In Suburban Living ...
One family who lives at East Park talks about changes for the better.
— Section 2

Who's who in Rolling Meadows Police Neighborhood Resource Center

■ **Rolling Meadows Police:** Two patrolmen, a supervisor and a bilingual social worker staff the PNR.

■ **Palatine Township Elementary District 15:** Provides teachers for after-school homework center and operates a summer leadership program for junior high students.

■ **Harper College:** Used \$54,000 grant to buy 15 personal computer systems and create an English-as-a-second-language program. English and GED classes are offered daily, with 175 students registered.

■ **Northwest Suburban High School District 214:** Holds family literacy and parenting classes. Opens school gyms for Friday night basketball and volleyball games.

Source: Rolling Meadows Police Department



Daily Herald Graphic

PNRC: Frequent foot patrols help to abate fear of police

Continued from Page 1

by police works to connect the residents with all the programs provided at the center and to the other social service aspects available through outside agencies.

English is taught on 15 new computers in the PNR to give residents skills in both areas. Parents take part in family literacy classes, which instruct parents in topics their children are learning so they can help their children study. Children can get assistance with homework four days a week from a bilingual teacher who challenges them to not only have better study habits but helps them learn English.

"This has gone way beyond our original vision," Aponte said.

Police recognized that if they wanted to get through to adults in the complex, improve communication and reduce residents' fear of police, they had to start with the children, said PNR officer Terry Capelen. Children who stopped by the office the first few months were given candy, and there were soccer and footballs loaned out for afternoon play in the courtyards.

This spring, residents are starting to come out of their apartments and meet one another, a noticeable change from last summer when many people stayed inside to stay from the problems, said 19-year-old resident Pola Marquez.

"The gangs had everyone intimidated. So what happened was the honest hard-working people who want to be a part of the American dream weren't getting outside help," said Sue Culbertson, who runs the after-school bilingual program through Palatine Township Elementary District 15.

"They aren't afraid to come out any more," she said.

Police patrol the neighborhood as part of an overall strategy that uses

the foot-patrol concept fostered in Flint, Mich., a decade ago that has spread throughout the country. The concept puts officers into the heart of a neighborhood to become familiar with its problems and its residents.

"The initial concept was to make an officer more familiar with an area by stationing them directly within it," said Flint Police Deputy Chief Clydell Duncan.

The Aurora Police Department implemented an offshoot, the community-oriented program, in early 1990 as the first of its kind in this region, said Lt. Tom Lukas, command officer with Aurora's community services bureau.

Hanover Park will be the next town to try to work with the community this way, Sauer said.

"It deals more with the problems in a cultural, human-relations way rather than using the police presence to just keep a lid on things," he said. "Rather, it goes after the things that culturally are a problem and for which there are services available if they just can be focused," he said.

Aponte said he warns other police departments to realize that they must have the cooperation of numerous social service agencies and to include the apartment complex owners from the beginning. Physical changes at the complex that include new windows, new kitchens, fenced in back yards, landscaping, graffiti removal and removing abandoned cars help increase the trust present in residents.

"The commitment on his (the property owners') part has helped immensely," Aponte said. "It shows the people you care, that they are receiving something better for their money."

Property manager Philip Kaufman, on the other hand, credits the community for turning things around.

SUBURBAN STORY

Rolling Meadows supports teen center zoning proposal

By CATHERINE EDMAN
Daily Herald Staff Writer

A proposal amending zoning codes to allow mechanical devices in one residential zone passed first muster at the Rolling Meadows city council and will move to a formal presentation next month.

Aldermen passed on a first reading a request to amend the zoning codes to allow the devices in general residence districts, but only in community centers such as that planned by the North Area Youth for Christ.

The Youth for Christ requested the change to allow several coin-

operated video games in a teen center they are constructing at the East Park Complex at Algonquin Road and Weber Drive. The video games are another way to lure teenagers away from gangs, said Art Favelick, a YFC worker.

The matter will now go to the next city council meeting June 11 for a vote after a presentation to explain the intentions for the permit.

When presented to the plan commission earlier in the month, the members tied and sent their decision forward to the council without a recommendation to pass or reject the measure.



"What I'm concerned about is setting a precedent in the R-3 district," said 1st Ward alderman Robert Taylor. If approved, the request would send the Youth for Christ back to the Plan Commission for Special Use approval permit to maintain the games.

A new lease on life

One short year ago, crime and drinking parties were taking their toll at a decaying apartment complex in Rolling Meadows. But residents say an unusual approach by local police is starting to show results.

By Catherine Egan
Daily Herald Staff Writer

Old Margress rarely lifted her eyes off the sidewalk last summer when she walked the short distance between her car and apartments in the East Park Apartments in Rolling Meadows.

To either side of her were scenes she'd rather not see. Large groups of men drinking beer, urinating on the lawn and shagging along with their already drunk buddies were commonplace.

Blades of grass were sprouted their way up between the moldy bits of concrete between the lawn and sidewalk. Small groups of men and boys, all wearing the colors of their gang, patrolled the complex to ward out "invaders" alike.

That was last summer.

But this spring, Pats, 19, is raising her head to talk to neighbors and, much to her surprise, has actually met a few of them. They are starting to venture beyond their front doors.

"It's a lot better...it's cleaner," Pats said. "I feel safer, so do the children. I see it in their faces that they feel safer."

The change, a noticeable reversal in the once rapidly declining suburban neighborhood near Algonquin and Wilke roads, began last December when the city's new police chief, Gerald Aponie, took a close look at the area. Instead of continuing to send officers into the complex on a daily basis as incidents occurred, he decided to challenge a system that had allowed the apartments, a virtual rental island predominantly populated by Mexican and Central American immigrants, to decay.

His suggestion: the Police Neighborhood

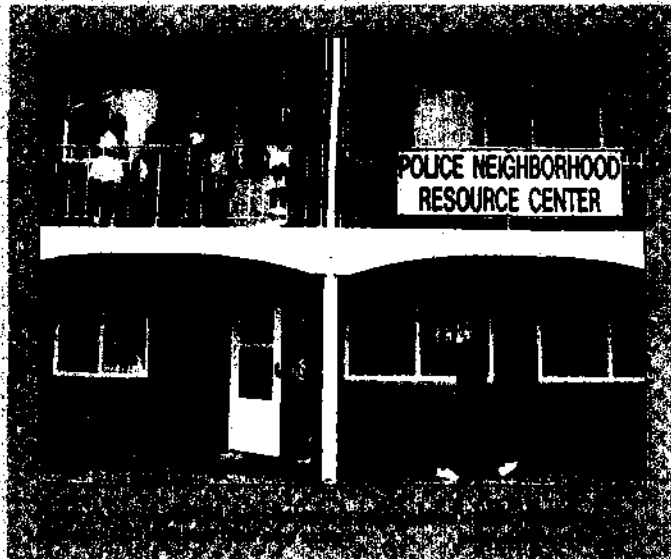
Resource Center, which combines a nearly-constant police presence with the resources of three social agencies, a library, a health center, a church, a food bank and a day care center. Working with the apartment complex owners, who said they spent \$3 million renovating the area, the police took over three apartments for their headquarters.

The premise: Life would improve for the residents if they stopped fearing police, and if services, such as adult education classes and after-school homework programs, could be brought to them from there.

The changes are visible to anyone who drives through the complex on a Friday night and fails to find hundreds of people gathered in the parking lot. But those who notice the difference most are the people it affects on a daily basis: those people who choose to make their homes there.

In August 1978, Hipolita Gamboa, a single mother with four children, left her behind in Mexico City to come to the United States. Her plan: to earn enough money working in factories to pay for her family to join her.

For two years she worked at a factory of



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LIFE: Unusual approach pays off for police

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jobs until she saved \$5,000, of which \$3,500 was used to buy the Banuelos family's freedom when she returned to Mexico to get them in 1980. That was the lump sum handed over to the men who smuggled her and her four children over the Mexican border into the United States.

That hard-earned money was their price for a slice of American pie, and for escaping a house with a dirt floor and tin roof that they shared with five other families.

"I just come to work and make money for my children. Here it is more easy to find jobs. Make easy money," said Hipolita, 36.

At times, however, money has not been so easy. For eight years, the family — whose members recently became U.S. citizens under a government amnesty program — moved from complex to complex for a variety of reasons: Sometimes they got kicked out because the kids violated the rules, sometimes they couldn't pay the rent.

Three years ago, the family was living in Wheeling when Hipolita was offered the chance to do volunteer work with the pastor of her church in an area she knew to be troubled: the East Park Apartment complex in Rolling Meadows. Although it wasn't until last summer that gang fights, mass drinking parties and small riots seemed to permeate the area, it still had a higher crime rate than the rest of the city — even three years ago.

"I remember one day when the police came into my apartment. I had to sign some papers. They was in my apartment for three minutes. When he go out, somebody broke the windows on the police car. It was bad over here. The gangs don't like the police over here," she said.

Despite the problems, Hipolita moved her family to the area to help her pastor.

Pola, Hipolita's daughter, wanted no part of the complex, but stayed out of deference to her mother. Her two younger brothers were actively involved with gangs and were never there anyway, and her sister had moved to Nevada. Usually, the small, two-bedroom apartment was occupied solely by Hipolita, Pola, and Pola's half-sister, Eva Segura, 6.

"I wanted to get out of here but my mom liked it. Since she's a Christian, she had a faith it was going to change," said Pola, who now has a little baby, Patricia. "I'm still trying to talk her into moving."

But one aspect definitely pleases Pola: She knows Eva is well taken care of at the Police Neighborhood Resource Center, where she goes quite willingly after school.

Police chief Gerald Aponte was assuming and honing other agencies



Residents at East Park Apartments gather to enjoy a cool treat and socialize.

Daily Herald Photo/Mark Welsh

ing them with questions and problems such as domestic violence and drinking. It is not unusual to find them out in the apartment common areas playing with the children in the complex after school.

Their office, converted from three apartments donated for \$1 per year by the management, sees a steady flow of people, ranging from residents needing help filing paperwork after a car accident to those wanting information about citizenship.

In addition, Palatine Township Elementary District 15, Harper Community College and Northwest Suburban High School District 214 hold a variety of classes there, including assistance with after-school homework, bilingual education, job-search training and citizenship courses.

It also serves as a central meeting place.

When the bus lets off students each day from the local elementary school, the children come barreling through the door of the office, asking for the officers, hoping to show them what they learned that day.

"People have gotten to know us now and there's respect on both

drinking alcohol, his sister paints a slightly different picture — one that includes the gangs.

"You'd see them walking all over all the time. It was like their turn, they would be watching for the outsiders," said Pola. "Now it's not around, but before you would see them all over walking. They would try making fights with people trying to tell them off. If an adult would tell them to get away from there or get off my car, they would try and pick a fight."

Ricky avoided the complex all last summer, preferring to live with his gang buddies, because there were too many rival gang members living at East Park, and he knew they knew where he lived. Previous fights had made him one of their prime enemies.

"I don't care if they do anything to me, but I don't want them to do anything to the house. We've been kicked out of so many complexes that it's sick."

Ricky was in the juvenile detention facility when the PNRC opened at East Park last December and has only seen the difference between last summer and last month. The num-

I'm not there (with the gang), I'm still in, though," he said. "If I were to tell them I wanted out, they would probably come out and shoot me."

Ricky says he is intent upon staying out of trouble, in part by working. Last week, he accepted a summer job with the Illinois Prairie Girl Scout Council, supervising a four-day-a-week program to provide activities for children in the East Park area. The man who got him the job? Terry Cappelen, the police officer who was nearly run over by Ricky two years ago.

Scavengers walking though the East Park area could have scored big on a Monday morning last summer. It was a beer-can-lover's dream, Pola said.

Hundreds of men from the area would gather in the parking lots for weekend drinking parties. With no air-conditioning in the apartments and too many men to fit inside anyway, the parking lots were popular.

"Before, it was scary to walk from your car to your apartment. Before, the men stay out all night drinking and making lots of noise. Before, they had guns they would shoot for no reason. You made sure the doors were all locked," Pola said.

"Sometimes you couldn't even find a parking place because they were all taken by men."

Cleanliness after the party was not an issue to the congregating residents.

"They wouldn't even bother throwing the case out, they would just leave the case wherever they were partying or laying. Upstairs from where I live, there used to be a whole bunch of guys. They would throw the cans outside from the second floor on the little bush outside our window. They used to try to make a basket from upstairs to the garbage can in the parking lot," she said.

Police were always at the complex for one reason or another, but they were so busy with other, more serious, problems that the drinking was not as important, she said.

"So far this summer it's been quiet," Pola said. "There's been some nights, but not like last summer. Then it was all of the nights."

It was one of the few reasons Ricky was glad he usually stayed with friends instead of his family.

"I don't know how to say it, but I was embarrassed to live here," he said.

The excessive drinking in public was one of the areas targeted by police because it was so visible and ultimately caused so many problems, according to Cappelen. The foot patrols through the neighborhood put a damper on those all-weekend bashes, he said.

"We felt that was the root of the problem with those big fights and disturbances."

“Residents now are calling us to tell us when something is going on. It used to be they would call us after the fact to say it.

Police chief Gerald Aponte was assuming, and hoping, other agencies would jump on the Resource Center bandwagon when opening a resource center was proposed last fall.

The PNRC concept got more than obligatory support from city officials who cut other city budgets to fund the program requiring an office, three full-time police officers and a full-time bilingual social worker. It was one of those rare occasions when an elected board fails to balk at a post-budget request for \$145,000.

A continuing commitment to clean up the city's highest crime district was unilaterally cited.

Although police were constantly being called to the problem area, which they said included three rental complexes — East Park, Park Meadows Apartments and Coachlight Condominiums — they were usually there after the incidents had occurred.

"Residents now are calling us to tell us when something is going on. It used to be they would call us after the fact to say it has already happened," said Linda Luehring, Rolling Meadows police support services coordinator.

"There's no question that the PNRC has had a positive effect on how police are perceived and how crime is now being reported," said deputy police chief Richard Hammer. "That center has definitely had an effect on all three complexes."

A police supervisor and two patrolmen are stationed at the PNRC full time, splitting shifts so the office is staffed at the very least between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. Two additional officers have been transferred to the office for the summer.

They patrol the area, making themselves known to residents, help-

they would call us after the fact to say it has already happened."

— Linda Luehring, Rolling Meadows police support services coordinator

sides," said Terry Cappelen, one of the full-time PNRC officers.

"I make a point of saying 'hi' when I walk around. I stop and talk to people, find out what's going on. That didn't happen before. You would pull up in a squad car, go in, do your business and get out of there. Nobody would say anything to anybody."

Riccardo "Ricky" Marquez was 14 when he tried to run over a police officer in Rolling Meadows. At the time it all was so simple to him. He wanted to steal a car, the police officer wanted him to stop, and the easiest way to remedy the dilemma was to get rid of the cop.

It didn't work. Officer Terry Cappelen jumped out of the way and Ricky, Hipolita's son, drove the stolen car into the basement of an apartment building.

That incident would be the first of several that would land Ricky, who for the past few years has rarely lived at home with his mother, in Department of Correction facilities. He was released from a juvenile detention center in May and vows not to return.

As Ricky describes it, he was a "gang-banger" from the time he was 13 years old. And he was less than pleased when his mother decided to move to East Park, the turf of a rival gang and a turf where he would be the sole representative of his own.

Although Ricky says the biggest problem in the complex was all the men hanging out in the parking lot

ber of gang-affiliated residents has dropped from more than 40 to less than 10, he said. Police confirm that they've identified a mere handful of gang-related teens who have remained in the area.

But the past month has been warm and that used to be the sign that bad times were on the way. That's the way it used to be, he said.

"This police thing worked. A lot of guys around here had warrants," he said. "Now they say 'don't go in Rolling Meadows. There's cops all over.'"

For Ricky, now 16, that may be a good thing. He was asked to leave Rolling Meadows High School last fall, and shortly thereafter ran into additional trouble with the law and was sent back to the DOC. The week he was released, he told his gang brothers he needed to "chill," what with his brother and sister leaving town to live in Nevada; his other sister, Pola, having recently had a baby; and his mom in need of extra money to help pay for family expenses.

"I just told them I want to chill out for a while. If I get caught for anything I'm going back (to the DOC) and I'm not going back. Even though

Hipolita Banuelos had a vision of America before she packed her bags and left Mexico for good.

"Neighborhoods were small, quiet, clean" with "not many people in the streets and lots of jobs."

Although it was her choice to move into the already-troubled area initially, there were many times afterward that she considered going back to another complex and commuting every day to help the residents. The property owners, however, are more than gracious, she said, to help her when the family faces difficulty paying the \$625 per month rent on the small two-bedroom apartment, which has its own fenced-in back yard.

"I pay my rent every week," said Hipolita. "When I have \$100, I pay \$100. When I have \$200, I pay \$200. They help me a lot. Another place, if you don't have money to pay all your rent they kick you out. In this apartment complex, they are good people to me."

Through all the problems and roadblocks that were unexpectedly set in her paths, Hipolita never regretted her decision to move her family to America. At its core, her choice was based in the desire for a better life for her children.

"In Mexico, if the people don't have money, the kids can't go to school," she said. "If the people's too poor, the children don't have anything."

