

TWO DECADES IS LONG ENOUGH

5081 LA PAZ

"I can remember back in 1971, when I was in patrol, we would take rocks, bottles, and gunfire from that address. We tried everything to shut that place down. I can't believe it is still a problem."

These words were spoken recently by a SDPD detective at a meeting that focused on a nuisance on the 5000 block of La Paz Street in Southeast San Diego. This nuisance has resulted in numerous police confrontations with the inhabitants of this address and their acquaintances. Records indicate that the residents of 5081 La Paz and their associates have engaged in illegal activities for over two decades. Police officers have used traditional responses such as selective enforcement, and executing search warrants in an unsuccessful attempt to halt the criminal activity on this street.

In January of 1988, the arrest of the suspected murderer of San Diego Police Officer Oerry Hartless was made at 5081 La Paz. This event resulted in a commitment from Southeast patrol officers to devise a strategy to finally close down the criminal activity at this address. The officers were Darby Darrow, David Williams, and Steven Kingkade. The three officers had worked in the southeast area of the city for a few years and had personally witnessed the destruction of life and other criminal activity that emanated from this address. Using their past experiences with the occupants of 5081 La Paz and their discussions with other police officers, the three officers identified the problem as illegal narcotic activities of the occupants of 5081 and their associates.

Officers Darrow, Williams, and Kingkade began collecting information relating to the address and its inhabitants. On their personal time, the officers went to the home and spoke with the elderly owner, a 71 year old

woman who owned the home using her monthly social security checks to support herself. The officers discovered that the only persons living in the house with the owner were her son, two grandsons, and one daughter. The officers knew from reviewing past arrest records and their own interactions with the residents, that dozens of people frequented the house at all hours of the day and night. The owner told the officers that she was willing to assist the police , but she would not evict her relatives and she would not move out of the house. She allowed Darrow, Williams, and Kingkade to take photographs of the interior and exterior of the house which revealed the poor condition of the residence.

The officers found difficulty in believing the owner's statements that she was oblivious to the drug dealing and use that occurred inside and outside of her home. They phoned the owner's private physician to ensure that she was not mentally and physically incompetent. Although reluctant to reveal any patient information, the physician assured the officers that the owner was mentally competent during her last visit with him.

Officers Darrow and Williams spoke with the owner's granddaughter who told the officers that she had previously attempted to move her grandmother out and board the residence, but was unsuccessful in convincing her grandmother to move. When the officers explained their intent to eliminate the illegal activity at this home using drug abatement or asset forfeiture to confiscate the property, the granddaughter promised to try again to move her grandmother from the residence. As the officers gathered more information, arrests and drug seizures continued to mount at 5081. Also during this time, the owner's son was arrested for parole violation and sent back to state prison.

All arrests and field interview records were collected by the officers who divided duties of data collection among themselves. To correctly calculate the number of radio calls at the property, the officers decided that they

needed information that the Communications Division had access to, but did not make available to area commands. With the assistance of their commanding officer, they submitted a formal request to Communications asking that Division to formulate a case every time an officer contacted someone on the 5000 block of La Paz Street. The new information from Communications permitted one officer to locate all radio calls and criminal histories associated with the property.

Darrow and Williams returned to the neighborhood to learn more from the area residents about the problems at 5081 La Paz. They conducted a brief survey of the neighbors which revealed that the area residents were willing to assist the officers in ridding their neighborhood of the ongoing problems at 5081, but feared retaliation from the occupants of the house. The officers spoke with the Narcotics Street Team to identify the numbers of search warrants executed at 5081 and were told that they would need a court order to obtain this information. To address the question of whether the elderly resident was a victim or a willing participant in a family drug business, the officers sought the assistance of a senior citizen group that focused on protecting the welfare and rights of the elderly.

While illegal activity continued at 5081 La Paz, the officers were successful in placing this property on the joint San Diego Abatement Task Force target list. The task force is comprised of representatives of the City Attorney's Office - Civil Division, The Fire Marshall, Building Code Inspectors, the Narcotics Street Team, the City Manager's Office, and patrol. An inspection by representatives of the housing, fire, and zoning offices has been scheduled. The officers also went to the County Narcotics Task Force for assistance on seizing the home through the federal or state asset forfeiture programs.

The officers continue to apply selective enforcement at this address to assure neighbors that the Police Department is available to provide for

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neighborhood safety while the other assisting agencies complete their work. In utilizing resources from many arenas, Officers Darrow, Williams, and Kingkade plan to reach their goal of providing a long term solution to a twenty year old community problem.