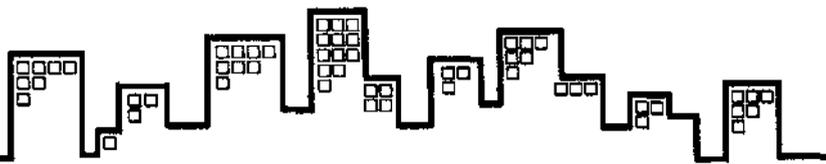


Keys to, the City



Problem Solving in the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department

SEPTEMBER, 1992

VOLUME 1, No. 2

🔑 Disturbances (Juveniles)

Officer Jim Carroll from the Third District Fox Park neighborhood was told by residents of the 2600 block of Oregon that they felt "terrorized" by neighborhood kids. The juveniles were roaming the streets during all hours of the day and night, creating disturbances. Jim quickly identified the problem juveniles and their homes. Two homes seemed to be the worst. Although each of the homes was a separate project, Jim worked on them simultaneously.

Jim discovered that both buildings were owned by absentee landlords. In both cases the mothers of the juveniles not only refused to help solve the problem, but refused to acknowledge that a problem existed. Jim then approached the landlords of each building and described the problem to them.

In the one case, the landlord claimed he would help in any way, but proved slow to act. By contacting the utility companies, Jim discovered that the electricity to this particular house had been disconnected, but noticed that the tenant had unlawfully tapped into another electric line. Union Electric was contacted and was eager to assist the officer in correcting this problem. Next, Jim contacted the City Housing Court. A representative inspected the premises and issued several summonses for various violations. Eventually, the building was condemned and the occupants moved. The owner has since refurbished the property and has agreed to work with the neighborhood to prevent future problems.

At the second location, the

landlord refused to cooperate with the neighborhood. Once again, Jim contacted the utility companies and learned that the water at this location was disconnected. He advised the Water Division that the water was on and requested an inspection. The water was once again disconnected. He then notified the Child Abuse Hot Line and informed them of the living conditions in the home. Because of the building's dilapidated condition, the Building Division was requested to make an inspection of the property. The bank that held the mortgage on the property was also informed of its condition. Ten days later, the property was condemned and the bank foreclosed on the mortgage. The house was auctioned off and is currently being renovated by its new owner.

O*53 Disorderly Tavern

At a meeting of the West Belle/North Sarah neighborhood organization, Mobile Reserve Officers Simon Risk and Gary Hill learned that the residents were very upset about the problems arising from the Shangri-La Lounge located at 927 N. Sarah. The residents told the officers that the front of the lounge had become a meeting place for prostitutes and their patrons. Some patrons would purchase alcohol from the lounge and drink it in a nearby park. Because of the large groups that gathered in the area, numerous fights and disturbances were reported each night. Some residents reported that on occasion they were accosted by intoxicated persons coming from the bar. They were hesitant to let their children play

in the park, fearing they might be harmed by a drunken patron. Calls for police service in this area ranged from drinking on the street to shootings.

To establish some control of the area, Simon and Gary strictly enforced several ordinances and statutes in the target area. Anyone caught drinking on the street, creating a disturbance, demonstrating for the purpose of prostitution, or fighting would be arrested and booked downtown. Soon, it was known on the street that violators were booked rather than released with a summons. This tactic seemed to reduce the foot traffic in the area.

Next, the officers talked with the owner of the lounge and explained the concerns of the area residents. The owner claimed she could not control what happened outside her establishment and argued that it was not her concern or responsibility. Receiving no cooperation from the owner, Gary and Simon began preparing a case against the Shangri-La Lounge. They hoped to prove that the lounge was a general detriment to the community and that several liquor, state, and local laws were being routinely violated. Knowing that if the case were to be heard at an Excise Commissioner's hearing, the officers would need excellent documentation and cooperation from the local residents if they were to prevail.

After securing the Television Section's video camera, equipped with a night vision lens, and a surveillance vehicle from the Intelligence Division, the officers set up

see TAVERN, p. 2

TAVERN, from p.1 surveillance in front of the lounge. After just two nights of taping, Simon and Gary recorded several violations of city and state liquor laws on video tape. They also recorded an incident in which a man in a wheelchair was assaulted. The local block unit captain was contacted and with his help the residents from the area attended the Excise Commissioner's hearing. The video tapes, along with two full days of testimony from area residents, convinced Commissioner Robert Kraiberg to deny a renewal of the liquor license for the Shangri-La. Without a liquor license the lounge closed. The work of the officers and the residents received a good deal of coverage by the local media.

The closing of the lounge brought an almost immediate halt to foot traffic in the area. The park is now being used by the local school to form ball leagues.

Property Damage

Two Tower Grove East neighbors contacted Third District Officer Guy Sextro with a complaint of property damage. The neighbors lived in adjacent houses with a grassy easement between them. Someone was driving through the easement, creating deep ruts and erosion. Guy discovered that the passageway was being used by another resident to enter his property. Although the grassy area was never designed for vehicle traffic, its purpose was to facilitate utility repair and maintenance.

Because the right-of-way was occasionally used by service vehicles, blocking it off was not the answer. Instead, Guy and the residents agreed that erecting a portable barrier might be the answer.

The utility companies agreed that a portable, locked barricade could be used. A three-post barricade was designed with connecting, draped chains. The end posts were set in concrete. The center post was removable when unlocked.

The cost of the project was shared by the residents. The ruts have been filled and the area cleaned.

Hazardous Waste and Unsafe Building

Fourth District Police Officers Dan Crowe and Rock Nilhas received a complaint of raw sewage draining into the alley behind 2501-2523 Cass Avenue. A 175 foot stream of sewage had formed and was coming from a storm pipe in the rear of the building. Several dead rats laid in or next to the stream. A local businessman explained to the officers that he had notified the Health Department over a month earlier and that officials had cited the occupant of the building for a violation. Dan and Rock contacted the Metropolitan Sewer District, the City Health Department and the St. Louis Rat Control Center and asked them to respond immediately to the site. Members of the Metropolitan Sewer District told the officers that the sewage runoff was caused by a blockage inside the building. They offered to run a free dye test to locate the blockage, but the owner of the building refused to allow this claiming he would correct the problem. The Health Department decided to cite the owner again.

The following day, Rock and Dan began to gather information on the owner and the building. At City Hall they learned that the occupant of the building was not the true owner. City records also showed that the building had been condemned in 1987, making it unlawful to occupy or conduct a business in the building. Police Department records of calls for service showed numerous complaints at this location, including one for a shooting. The officers learned that the building was being used to operate an auto repair and body shop. The man operating the business had five outstanding bench warrants, including two for bad checks and two for operating a business without a license.

Officials from the City

Building Division advised the officers to enforce all violations. The following day Dan and Rock returned to 2515 Cass accompanied by a building inspector. After arresting the occupant for the outstanding warrants, they made an inspection of the building. As the officers toured the building, they took soil photographs of many violations. They documented improper plumbing, fire code violations, and occupancy violations. The occupant was warned about the violation of the condemnation order.

The very next day the occupant was back in the building conducting his business. Rock and Dan responded and issued the proper summonses. The officers kept in contact with the various city agencies, keeping them informed of the violations and seeking their advice and assistance. They also interviewed the workers at 2515 Cass, attempting to prove that they were paid employees. Later that week, the officers made a follow-up inspection. They found that the occupant was again doing business. This time, he was issued a summons for the violations and booked.

That week the Chief of Police and the City Building commissioner were served with a temporary restraining order prohibiting members of the Police Department and the Buildings Division from any further contact with the occupant. A court hearing on the restraining order would be held two weeks later.

Preparing for the hearing, Dan and Rock gathered additional information. They learned that the condemnation order had been lifted in error by a Building Division supervisor a few years ago. Nonetheless, knowing of the continued violations of codes, the officers asked the City Lighting Division to send a truck, equipped with a bucket lift to the rear of 2515 Cass. Because the building had no roof, the officers used the lift to raise them over the wall. From there, they were able to videotape 45 minutes of numerous ordinance-end

HAZARDOUS, from p. 2

code violations. At the court hearing, the videotape was offered into evidence. After viewing the tape, the attorneys agreed to dissolve the temporary restraining order. The occupant was then given thirty days to clean up the building and acquire the proper permits.

Follow-up inspections by the officers showed little cleanup progress. The officers have since gone back to court and forced the occupant to clean the site and vacate the premises.

Dan notes that their successful progress on this problem has depended on perseverance and attending to details. Checking on the ownership of the property, researching code violations, following up everyday at the problem location, having other concerned agencies respond to the location to note violations, following up with each agency, attending all court hearings, documenting their efforts, and recording violations on film have all been vital to their progress. Dan and Rock acknowledge the help from the following agencies: Metropolitan Sewer District, City Health Inspector, City Water Division, Union Electric Company, City Rat Control, Fire Department, City Lighting, Laclede Gas Company, Internal Revenue Service, City Courts #2 and #3, Civil Courts #2 and #27, and the Police Department's Legal Division.

0*=[^] Burglary, Vandalism, Panhandling, Littering, Drunk & Disorderly

More than a year ago, Ninth District Officers George Jonas and Fred Lengerer became involved in problem solving policing. After hearing about this new philosophy from their supervisors, Fred and George decided to adopt a project of their own. Because of their night watch assignment, they wanted to choose a project that they were familiar with and one that could be

managed during their tour of duty. Although the officers are assigned to separate patrol vehicles, they decided to combine their efforts and attack this common problem.

Using information from the Department's "Land Track" (computerized crime mapping) and H.S.L. systems, Fred and George identified the problem of burglaries and repeated acts of vandalism to businesses. These incidents were occurring in the 2600 to 3600 blocks of Washington and Locust. This ten-block area is home to 106 small businesses. The problem is compounded by the large number of transient and homeless people roaming the area. Most every night, vagrants can be found sleeping in the doorways of the local businesses. The Harbor Light and Salvation Army facilities are located in the center of the target area. From the beginning, Fred and George realized that reaching a long term solution to the problem would require working with the homeless in the area.

The first step was to establish a more accurate time frame when the crimes were occurring. To do this, the officers checked each building at the beginning of their shift and again at a later, predetermined time. By creating a Field Interview (F.I.R.) file, George and Fred identified the vagrants and homeless people in the area. Select laws were strictly enforced in the target area to assert some controls on the illegal behavior of some offenders. To communicate with the owners of the businesses, George and Fred wrote letters of introduction. They described the problem they were working on and asked for the business owners' cooperation. To hasten their building checks, the officers requested that the business owners place decals on all the store windows. At a glance, the officers could tell if the window was intact. They also asked the owners to stencil the street addresses on the rear of the building so they could be seen from the alley.

After analyzing the burglaries in the area, three distinct methods of entry were discovered: smashing windows, entering through the roof or second floor windows, and using a vehicle to crash through the overhead doors in the rear of the buildings. Fred and George then sent information about products that might safeguard against these types of entry to the businesses. The officers conducted a survey of the lights in the area that revealed thirty-two burned out lamps. City Lighting was contacted and to date they have repaired 25 of the fixtures.

Believing that an increased police presence might help reduce the number of incidents of burglary and vandalism, Fred and George parked an extra patrol car at various locations inside the target area. They hoped that this would deter crime by giving the impression that the police were present.

By the officers' calculations, reported crime in the target area was reduced by about one-third of the levels prior to implementing their strategy.

To seek solutions to the problems of begging, drinking in public, and littering of beer bottles in the downtown and near downtown area, the officers requested a meeting with several city court judges and Dave Miller of the City Counselor's Office. Joined by Fourth District Officers Dan Crowe and Rock Nilhas, the group decided to use the city's alternative work release program as an option for defendants convicted of these violations. "Project Pride" gives defendants the option to pay a \$100 fine or do four hours of community service cleaning up the downtown streets and alleys. The monthly cleanup, supervised by these officers, tailors the punishment to fit the offense; gives the courts an appropriate, enforceable sanction; gives the community cleaner streets; and allows defendants to do something that enhances community pride.

DIRECTIONS

What are the little key symbols in the article?

The name of the newsletter, *Keys to the City*, relates to the key words that you see at the heading of each short article. The symbols just call those key words to your attention. We are trying to build up an index of these key words that will allow you to search for other projects that might be related to one you are working on. The Police Library will be indexing the newsletters by those key words. They will also be cross-indexed with videotapes if any are made as part of a project. Copies of videotapes will be stored in the TV Unit's video library. The key words will also help you search a new HSL file in which we will summarize a lot of officers' problem solving projects. This new computer file should be up and running soon. HSL allows you to search a file for any word or number in the entire file. For example, if you want to find other projects related to prostitution, you will be able to search for the word "prostitution", and HSL will highlight every line in which that word appears. We hope officers will find this useful as more projects are completed. What's all this talk about reorganization?

So far, it's just talk, but let me give you the background. Throughout the year the command staff has met to discuss the implications that the "COPS

philosophy "has on the management and organization of the department. Chief Harmon has been asking commanders to give him ideas and recommendations about staffing, organizational structure, rank structure, chains of command, rank responsibilities, etc. But the Chief doesn't want these ideas to come solely from commanders. Accordingly, he asked that a group of employees from all ranks, sworn and civilian, be put together to draft some recommendations on the organizational structure of the department. Not everyone who is qualified to participate in such a group can do so, but we looked for a balance of knowledge and experience in the group. We wanted a group that represented all ranks, reflected the demographic diversity of the department, had experience with the problem solving approach, knew the department well, and was willing to seek other people's advice. The members of the group are Police Officers George Jonas and Robert Heimberger, Sergeants John Taylor and Rochelle Jones, Lieutenant Toni Filla, Captain Steve Pollihan, Personnel Manager Kurt Delabar, Budget and Finance Director Joe Miklovic, Major Charles McCrary, Deputy Chief Ron Henderson, Deputy Chief Ray Lauer and myself, Mike Scott



Keys to the City is a regular publication of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department designed to share examples of good police-community problem solving in the City of St. Louis. Project descriptions should be sent to Mike Scott in Room 607 of Headquarters by departmental or electronic mail. Inquiries can also be directed to 444-5681.

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