

Want to Stave off Home Burglary?

Know Thy Neighbor

By Jennifer Wake

On the Monday of Memorial Day weekend, Carole Hagglund and her husband, Jay, decided to return early to their Lafayette home after their weekend trip. It was 1 p.m. when Hagglund went through her back gate to check on her plants while her husband brought their bags in through the front door.

In the backyard, Hagglund was greeted by two large men, whom she assumed were there to work on the pool or were part of her gardener's crew. "I am a very naïve and trusting person," she said. "I am used to seeing unfamiliar guys in our backyard. I asked what they were doing and they gave me the standard line: They were looking for the Johnson's. As they walked past me towards their car parked on the street, I began to follow them."

Her husband yelled for her to get back in the house and to call 911. "That's when I knew something was wrong," she said. The Hagglund's master bedroom sliding door had been forced open with a crow bar; pillow cases and duffle bags sat filled with the couple's belongings on the floor.

Although the Lamorinda area has one of the lowest crime rates in California, it is not immune from crime. Between January and April 2007, Lafayette had 23 home burglaries and 23 car thefts, according to the Lafayette Police. And Police Chief Mike Hubbard says when summer vacations ramp up, so does criminal activity.

"This is the time of year that most folks start to gear up for the vacation season. Unfortunately the burglars start to gear up for the season as well," Hubbard wrote on the City Manager's Web site. With 42 sworn police officers on staff in the three Lamorinda communities, neighborhood watch programs are an important component to crime prevention, but neighbors need to get involved.

Lior Rubin, owner of Global Security Systems in Moraga, says if you do not have an alarm system, a key deterrent to home burglary is to know your neighbors. "Some victims of burglary have had their homes completely emptied by what appeared to be a moving company. The neighbors saw the truck arrive and watched the men empty the house," Lior said. "They didn't call the police because they assumed the neighbor, whom they hardly knew, was moving."

Lior suggests informing each other when workers are scheduled to be at your home so impostors can't steal valuables. "If your neighbor hasn't informed you of the work to be done, call the police," he said.

Chief Hubbard suggests having someone pick up your newspaper or mail (burglars are now able to find out who has discontinued a newspaper while on vacation); set light timers at alternate times and different locations throughout the house; trim foliage near entryways; don't announce vacations on voicemail; unplug your garage door opener and lock all windows and doors.

The Hagglund's did lock their house, but admit they did some things wrong: they left newspapers on the driveway, mail in the mailbox, and parked their second car in the garage versus the driveway. Hagglund applauded the police response to their call, but feels there are not enough police in Lafayette.

"Although we wrote down the license plate number [of the burglar's vehicle], and found the owner of the car, no one has been able to follow up," said Hagglund, who was disappointed about the recent failure of Measure P, which would have funded more police officers in the area. "The police who



came were terrific, but there just aren't enough of them to investigate this further."

The Hagglunds are considering hiring a retired police officer to continue their investigation. They have also installed an alarm system and have started a neighborhood watch program.

For more information about what you can do to protect your home, contact your local police department or view home safety tips at www.globalsecuritysystems.net.



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