

Orinda Beefs Up Solicitor Ordinance

By Andrea A. Firth

The Orinda City Council recently revised the City's ordinance for regulations related to peddlers and solicitors. "Essentially we made it stronger," states Police Chief Bill French. "This ordinance is a tool which helps the police to know who is in the City and who is going door to door." The ordinance requires individuals to register with the police department before selling or taking orders and allows the police to enforce trespass laws against solicitors who ignore "No Soliciting" signs posted by residents.

"It's very common for a van load of nine or ten young adults to be dropped off in a neighborhood with the objective to solicit residents to purchase magazines or other products," explains Chief French. "They can be very aggressive and often misrepresent who they are," he adds. Solicitors might state that they are selling magazines as a fundraiser for a local group when they are actually working for a for-profit organization based out of state. "They can't misrepresent themselves. That doesn't work for us," says French. "They are taking advantage of residents whose hearts are in the right place but who then feel they have been fooled and tricked," he adds.

Due to the often aggressive nature of this type of solicitor, the police department will receive several calls from

residents when groups are canvassing the city. "It's not uncommon to receive these calls. This happens throughout the area. It's not unique to Orinda. These groups hit a different city each day," states French.

Each solicitor must register at City Hall, provide valid identification and a photograph, and pay a registration fee. A warrant check is conducted to ensure the solicitor has no criminal history, and if approved, the solicitor is given a photo registration card that must be displayed at all times. Although not all solicitors are participating in fraudulent schemes, Chief French points out that paying a solicitor with a check then provides that individual with your name, address, signature, and bank account information. "They are collecting all that data, so it is important to be cautious," he adds.

Solicitors are not welcome at homes that display "No Solicitors" signage. "Under the ordinance, they can't even knock on the door, and we have the ability make an arrest or issue a citation for trespassing," explains French. He strongly recommends that residents who do not want to deal with solicitors put out a sign. "And, if you don't know the person at the door, don't open it until they identify themselves and you are comfortable," he warns.