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Burglaries and Arrests Up in Orinda

By Andrea A. Firth

There were 26 residential burglaries in Orinda between January and April, a fairly significant increase in property crime for a community that typically has an average of two to four residential burglaries a month. Orinda's increased number of home break-ins corresponds directly with an increase in the number of residential burglaries in several nearby cities during the same period, according to Orinda Police Chief Jeff Jennings.

The Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department was able to provide Jennings and his team with a crime map and statistical data to help them develop a plan of action. The Orinda Police Department (OPD) also reached out to the community through emails alerts to help track down leads. A tip line was also established which led Orinda Police to two separate suspects. Subsequently in April and May, the OPD made ten arrests related to commercial and residential burglaries and possession of stolen property.

Jennings says recently the OPD has found burglars working in groups of two to four. Often they choose a home where the entrance is not clearly visible from the street or by neighbors. If the perpetrators find no one is home after knocking on the front door, they proceed to a side or service door and kick it in. A common denominator for homes that get burglarized is that there is no home alarm system or the alarm is not activated. "These guys are opportunists. They are in and out of the home really quick," says Jennings, noting that they take items like electronics that they can resell quickly.

To help residents better protect their homes from burglary, the OPD recently launched a program to educate homeowners and make safety recommendations for home security. Residents can request a member of the OPD visit the home, by appointment, to perform a security audit. The audit takes about 15 minutes and assesses a number of factors related to the exterior and interior security of the home. The intent of the program is to minimize the risk of burglary and make the home less attractive to potential burglars.

"Orinda is one of the safest cities in the nation," says Jennings, "Property crimes are what we deal with here."

To schedule a home security audit, contact the Orinda Police Department non-emergency number at (925) 254-6820. Business Watch in Orinda

A group of Orinda business owners/representatives recently attended a meeting, hosted by Dina Zapanta of First Republic Bank, with Orinda Police Sergeant Neil Rafanan to discuss crime prevention in their downtown businesses. These new Business Watch members, supported by the Chamber of Commerce, will meet every month to discuss issues and prevention measures.

"There is much interest in this topic and I'm glad the Chamber is filling the need," said Chamber President Sue Breedlove after the meeting, "As an advocate for the business community, this is something we should definitely take the lead on."

One hot topic was the after-school crowd - apparently some of the middle school kids are creating problems. "They run into Loard's, steal candy, and run out," said Breedlove, "The toy store in Theatre Square limits (unaccompanied) kids to three in the store at one time because of the problems they create as a crowd."

The next Watch meeting is scheduled for 8:00 a.m. on June 28, at Table 24. "The group expressed interest in meeting every month for these first few months and then move to quarterly," added Breedlove, "the following month we'll move to the other side of town or meet at City Hall." The meeting is open to all Orinda businesses. S. Braccini

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