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Neighborhood Watch - a Helpful Burglary Deterrent

By Cathy Tyson



After a few homes were burglarized in her neighborhood, including the Lafayette City Manager's home, Elizabeth LaScala was concerned when she heard a loud alarm on the house directly next door go off last week. That was the tipping point that motivated her to call Lafayette Police to set up a Neighborhood Watch meeting.

She learned via the Community Services Officer, Cathy Surges-Moscato, that police make house calls for neighborhood groups, giving an educational presentation and answering questions about how to make the neighborhood safer. She took the next available slot on September 11 to host interested neighbors. "We anticipate a crowd, there have been lots of RSVPs," reports LaScala.

Lafayette's Chief of Police Eric Christensen said they have solved two of the four burglaries in that area and, "We may have gotten some leads on the other two as well. We would welcome them establishing a program! I am more than happy to do our part to help."

"A Neighborhood Watch group doesn't need to be very complicated," said Lafayette's Crime Prevention Commissioner Traci Reilly. "It can be as simple as a group of

neighbors putting together a phone/email list to use as a means of communication when problems arise." She feels it's helpful when neighbors know one another - promoting a sense of community. Being familiar with residents' cars and letting those nearby know when they'll be out of town, is a useful heads-up to keep an eye out for unusual activity.

She's in favor of the program, "I feel that Neighborhood Watch groups are very effective because it allows us to be the eyes and ears of our city. The police can't patrol every street all the time, so they rely on us to pay attention and report suspicious activity. We have had some very good tips come from residents who were paying attention and then called the police." Timeliness is important, she adds, calling in an unusual vehicle promptly may turn out to be critical to police and help solve a crime.

Reilly said that her neighborhood has a Watch program - she hosted their meeting last year and as Commissioner she's worked with many other neighborhood groups. "I've always found them to be a great way for residents to connect with one another and the Lafayette Police. There are good questions and interest about what is happening in and around Lafayette. Most people that attend the meetings find them to be useful, and are glad that they attended." She suggests that more neighbors be proactive and set up a meeting in their neighborhood before someone experiences a burglary.

All three towns support Neighborhood Watch, simply call the main business office for more information and to set up a time. Moraga and Orinda also offer to check on homes while residents are on vacation. Orinda provides home security audits upon request - an officer goes around the perimeter of a home checking on possible burglar entry points.

To set up your own neighborhood watch program:

In Lafayette contact Community Services Officer Cathy Surges-Moscato at (925)283-3680

Moraga - call the main office number at (925) 376-2515

Orinda - call the main office number at (925) 254-6820

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

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