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## Burglars, Beware:

*The eyes of homeowners may be upon you!*

By Cathy Dausman



The entrance to this gated neighborhood in Lamorinda includes a security camera. Photo Andy Scheck

Sometimes it will even show the license plates. "Lafayette [police department] has had real success with camera use [to help solve crimes]," Davis said.

Lafayette Police Chief Eric Christensen said a number of Lafayette neighborhoods have already installed residential cameras, and the city's crime prevention commission is considering installing them at various city entry points. He cited six recent cases in which footage from residential camera systems helped develop leads. In one case, police responded to a break in along Reed Drive.

The homeowners were gone, but a neighbor who spoke to police mentioned a resident's security camera which covered the street. Using the video, police were able to identify the make, model and year of the suspect vehicle, and even saw photos of the female suspect pointing to the victim's house. From that lead, Lafayette Police sifted through Department of Motor Vehicle records and found a matching - stolen - suspect car.

"That's the value," said Christensen. He echoed Davis, saying the "most effective" surveillance cameras are the ones aimed at the street. "If neighborhoods can install them near a 'choke [egress] point' that is a significant value," he added.

Orinda Police Chief Scott Haggard sees both sides of the coin. Cameras, along with burglar alarms, he said, "may serve as a strong deterrent to your home," especially with signs warning of their presence. They're not foolproof, though.

"Most burglars are aware of the use of cameras and they tend to wear hoods or pulled down caps to conceal their face. I have viewed many video tapes of crimes that are rendered of minimal value because the subject cannot be identified," he said. "Conversely, cameras have identified many subjects."

Haggard suggests homeowners considering surveillance cameras look into the video motion and off-site monitoring which alarm companies offer. "They cost," he said, "but they come with audio that the alarm company can see and hear." Additionally such systems allow the alarm company to give police a 'play by play' until police arrive on site.

Realtor Diane Reilly of Alain Pinel Realtors echoes Haggard's preference for off-site video monitoring capabilities. "Personally, I have found that for most buyers a security system is a must-have, and an up-to-date, state of the art security system with cameras and being able to monitor on iPad or cell phone is very desirable," Reilly said.

Reilly's co-worker, Ben Marshall, is more cautious: "I think it can come in handy, but it's a relatively cheap thing to install so it wouldn't increase the value of a home. If anything, seeing a security system in a house would give me pause, because I would assume that the previous owners didn't feel safe in that home," Marshall said.

Lastly, an insurance company weighs in on the matter. Abbe Sultan, president of Lafayette's Stone Creek Insurance, said he's actually brought up the use of surveillance cameras with their carriers.

"We live in an area where it's a little more affluent," Sultan said, and although insurance companies will offer a discount for homeowners who have central alarm systems or fire sprinklers, having security cameras offers "no

The good news: Lamorindans live in an affluent area. The bad news: that affluence can entice would-be burglars. That is why Moraga Police Detective Will Davis is a fan of residential security cameras.

"A security camera adds a level of protection," he said. "I'd be the first to voice concerns over Big Brother," Davis added, but he feels the camera benefits outweigh any detractors. Simply put, the cameras never sleep, and the video evidence they produce is readily admissible in court.

Homeowners who are installing security cameras should consider having one that monitors the front of their house, and another that captures a view of the street, he said. The street view will capture auto traffic, and that could be key to tracking down any suspects.

Davis said Moraga neighborhoods with one or two entrance roads and one or two exits are places which would most benefit from such cameras. Sanders Ranch has a camera at its entry guard shack, and video from the camera helped police search for a suspect vehicle after a burglary there in June.

Police learned a car was involved in that daytime residential burglary; Davis said video from that day was valuable in developing a general vehicle description.

additional discount."

The camera "doesn't inform," he said, "it only captures."

And that may be the homeowner's ... and law enforcement's ... fondest dream.



Typical surveillance camera Photo Cathy Dausman

Reach the reporter at: [cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com)

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