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Best Practices to Prevent Burglaries Discussed at Town Hall

By Cathy Tyson



Lafayette police chief Eric Christensen and Dale Fredericks at the Happy Valley Elementary School Library. Photo Cathy Tyson

While the subject matter was serious, Lafayette police chief Eric Christensen couldn't have been more entertaining and reassuring to concerned residents who attended a town hall meeting at Happy Valley Elementary School in the wake of a robbery and recent burglaries in the neighborhood.

Kicking off the meeting, Rees Morgan, a member of the city's Crime Prevention Commission, introduced his fellow volunteer commissioners and described himself as a "federal prosecutor in a previous life." He discussed the educational goal of the meeting - to spread crime prevention best practices to the community that, due to its proximity to the freeway and perception of affluence, is a potential target for bad guys. The commission is wrapping up its research on motion-activated cameras that currently are in use in a number of communities, are cost effective and produce crisp images of license plates. In August the group will present its findings to the City Council, which is investigating a collaborative effort

of homeowner cameras and city-owned cameras at key locations in Lafayette.

Christensen explained that the recent robbery was a random act; the alleged suspect has been connected to other robberies.

Focusing on proactive solutions, the charming chief had residents chuckling with clever asides, such as calling a jewelry box a "to-go container" for burglars. His advice - jewelry is a priority item when would-be burglars make the traditionally quick pass through a house so make sure expensive items are in an unusual place.

Fifty signs were recently printed up and are available for neighborhoods to display to send a clear message that cameras are in use. New technology options are being used to track bike thefts at the library and will soon be used on "bait" packages purposefully left on front porches in plain sight.

Rear door window smash is the most common mode of entry - so the chief recommends locking side gates in order to discourage prospective criminals from selecting your home as a target.

"Who knows the neighborhood better than you do?" asked Christensen, who strongly suggested residents call or email whenever something is unusual at 94549tip@gmail.com or via 911 or dispatch at (925) 284-5010. He emphasized that this can be crucial information to help complete an investigation, if someone saw a questionable car or person - pass that information to the police as soon as possible. Residents can also sign up to receive alerts from the police department at www.nixle.com.

Going on vacation? Here are some tips from Chief Christensen:
 Lock doors and windows; never leave a house key hidden outside.
 Don't stop the newspaper, have a neighbor pick it up.
 Have the Post Office hold your mail.
 Make the house appear lived in; use timers on lights.
 Leave a radio on.
 Leave a locked car in the driveway.

Leave your trip plans and an emergency phone number with a trusted neighbor or friend.

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