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Quick, In and Out - and Silent

By Laurie Snyder

Despite a recent incident on La Espiral Road during which a pair of mask-clad miscreants allegedly broke into a home post-midnight and pistol-whipped two residents, robberies in America's Second Friendliest City have historically been non-violent crimes of opportunity rather than face-offs between terrified townspeople and fearless felons. The average offender, says Police Chief Mark Nagel, is one who prefers "quick, in and out, and silent" encounters.

In one recent case, a resident "got home from work at 4:30 or 5 and found a smashed window." The bad guy was long gone, and neighbors hadn't seen or heard anything. "It's frustrating on our part because we're looking for leads, but there aren't any."

An equally vexing problem is that Lamorindans can also sometimes be their own worst enemies. Wrapped in a cocoon of complacency borne from decades of historically low crime rates, locals tempt fate by leaving windows wide open while taking walks with their dogs, "hiding" precious family heirlooms in the oh-so-obvious spots used by everyone since God was a boy, and inviting smash-and-dash pilfering by leaving cell phones and other goodies on car seats while heading off for runs at the Res.

In the case of the atypical La Espiral incident, the college students renting the home had left the front door of the house unlocked before going to bed. Imagine how that scenario might have played out, says Nagel, if a simple flick of a wrist had dead-bolted the door. "The robbers would have had to make a lot of noise. It would have given the victims some time to prepare - to call 911 - to escape. All of that was taken away."

In his message this month, Nagel is asking residents to fine tune their personal safety by creating "layers of security." Install kick proof doors. Get a dog that barks. Install a safe and bolt it to the floor. Make sure your exterior security cameras are in good working order. And then lock your doors and windows. "When you let down one critical aspect - the actual locked door - it kind of defeats all of the other systems that are in play."

And, keep visual and written records of valuables - for investigation and insurance purposes. "If someone just submits 'gold chain,' it doesn't really help very much. Take pictures of it all so that, when it's pawned, we can identify it." One way to do this, suggests Nagel, is to use your smart phone to take photographs, labeling those shots with the items' serial numbers.

The La Espiral investigation has been made more challenging because the victims had not, as of press time, furnished serial numbers to help police track stolen items. "Officers are exploring the possibility that the suspects may have been acquainted with the home or residents," says Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department spokesman Jimmy Lee. Orinda's investigative unit has already developed leads in the case because the perpetrators appear to have been specifically looking for something the victims had in their possession. "This was not random," adds Nagel. "It was targeted and specific."

As always, anyone with any information about cases currently under investigation - or who witnesses suspicious behavior - is urged to call the police department at (925) 254-6820.

From Nixle to Nextdoor - Staying Safe by Staying Connected

Orinda Police Chief Mark Nagel recently announced another way for Orindans to stay informed about public safety issues - by signing up for and staying active with the online neighborhood networking site, Nextdoor (<https://nextdoor.com>).

"Orinda has 38 neighborhoods or groups on Nextdoor totaling over 3,600 people. By being on that network, I can immediately notify 3,600 people of a message or advisement." Orindans on Nextdoor will also be able to reply back to police department messages as well, but needn't worry about privacy. "They can reply to what I send, but I won't hear or see the chats from group to

group or neighbor to neighbor," says Nagel. "The Orinda PD is a neighbor, if you will. If somebody sends me a private message asking about field weapon permits, no one else will see that. It goes right to the Orinda PD."

Early on in his tenure, Nagel launched an email tipline, and also helped the city make better use of the Nixle alert system used by the Town of Moraga. "I'm trying to cover every aspect of communication. I do hope if any kind of suspect information develops that residents or business owners reach out - whether it be Nextdoor, or the tipline or a phone call."

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