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Less Crime in Lafayette

By Cathy Tyson



From left: Lafayette Police Sgt. Dan Nugent with new officer James Brooks and Chief Eric Christensen. Photo provided

Although Lafayette is arguably a safe community to begin with, Lafayette Police Chief Eric Christensen reported at a recent city council meeting that the overall crime rate is down almost 19 percent in 2014. He thinks it boils down to the community transitioning from reacting to crime to preventing it in the first place.

The chief was proud of the work the department is doing and credits citizen involvement, cameras, saturation patrols, and predictive policing that outsmarted bad guys.

The chief came to Lafayette in 2012 with over 20 years of law enforcement experience, and has embraced techniques and technologies that are making Lafayette less dangerous. Initial efforts included encouraging neighborhood watch groups throughout the city, creating anonymous phone and email tip lines, and adding more components over the years.

With the city's lowest property crime rate in 10 years, the department should be proud of its hard work. Christensen credits new license plate reading cameras in numerous areas - some city-owned and operated, others sponsored by neighborhood groups (see the Feb. 25 Lamorinda Weekly story, "Combined City Councils Ponder Public Safety in Lamorinda" in the archives). The automated license plate readers have been effective in obtaining critical information to narrow the search for thieves quickly, thus boosting the solve rate to 33 percent of property crimes. "Word gets out among criminals that Lafayette is a place where they get caught. That's the reputation we want to have," said Christensen.

Does it seem like cops are everywhere at various times? From time to time, the entire department is out on saturation patrol. Simply having a robust visual presence sends a message. While that helps, there are still auto burglaries in town, 96 last year, along with petty thefts from cars - a total of 62 in 2014. In addition, there were 48 residential burglaries, down over 20 percent from last year, with thieves focusing mainly on jewelry. Another clever strategy the police are using to outsmart would-be criminals is predictive policing. Data shows when crimes are likely to be trending - usually on certain days in November and December. By doing their homework, local police know when crimes usually occur, so extra officers are deployed from the sheriff's department to work here on those historically higher crime days, three days per week, over those months. The chief said there have been zero robberies on those days since this was implemented.

At the end of the presentation, the city manager and several residents thanked Christensen for his commendable work for the city of Lafayette.

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