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An Ounce of Prevention

By Cathy Tyson



Chief of Police Eric Christensen and chair of the Emergency Preparedness Commission, Fred Lothrop, at the Veterans Hall Security Camera Town Hall meeting. Photo Cathy Tyson

been substantial advancements in the technology of camera systems, making them a cost-effective tool for the city as well as neighborhoods and individual homeowners. The city council asked the CPC to look into the cost and effectiveness of surveillance options last year. After extensive research, the group recommended fixed motion activated cameras "as the best way to go," said Burk. The Commission meets every fourth Wednesday, and the public is encouraged to attend.

The charismatic headliner of the meeting, also known as Lafayette's chief of police, Eric Christensen, was entertaining and informative, delivering real-life local crime drama and a fair amount of laughter. Before describing how the layers of camera security are working together and best practices, the chief got off to a solid start by asking, "If you're a criminal, can you leave now?"

"This is America - land of opportunity; unfortunately criminals are opportunists," said the chief. He explained that it all starts with personal responsibility, such as not leaving valuables in plain view in a car, and locking doors. "If you leave your laptop in your car overnight - should you be shocked if it disappears?" he asked.

There were 48 residential burglaries in Lafayette last year and a whopping 1,769 false alarms. "What criminal would stick around, with a loud audible alarm blaring?" asked Christensen, although he added that sometimes it's the housekeeper, or the homeowner's kids who trigger activation.

With 95 percent of crimes in Lafayette involving a vehicle, "we spend a lot of time hunting cars," said Christensen. Police want to get the word out among the criminal community that this is a less than ideal choice of robbery location.

A powerful presentation of images of actual robberies in town, complete with suspects' clear license plate pictures, highlighted the effectiveness of the interaction of home, neighborhood and city cameras. Pictures also offer a concrete level of proof to help prosecute suspects. The combination of home security cameras, neighborhood cameras at locations where there is only one way in and out, along with cameras the city has placed at key locations work together to garner indisputable evidence.

Wrapping up the talk, Christensen reminded residents that police also offer home-away watch.

The numbers tell the story. With a 19 percent overall reduction in all crimes, and residential burglaries down 21 percent in 2014, the Lafayette Police Department's prevention strategy is working.

And it only gets better. So far in 2015, residential burglaries are down an astonishing 70 percent. How is this possible? According to the chief of police, vice mayor Traci Reilly and Cam Burks of the Crime Prevention Commission (CPC), what's making this little slice of semi-rural paradise an undesirable place for crooks is a combination of alert neighbors and layers of security cameras within the city limits.

The trio came together to address a recent special meeting of the Crime Prevention Commission. Reilly, who is also a graduate of the first citizen's police academy, welcomed a full house to the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Center for an informative session on crime prevention and security cameras.

Burks was up next. He talked about how communication is critical, adding that there have

If a resident is away on vacation, the police will check your home's doors and windows, and send a daily text to homeowners that all is well. He added that they would not be watering plants or feeding the cat.

A woman spoke up during the question and answer period, explaining that about 40 of the 50 homes in her neighborhood contributed \$100 per household, which covers all the equipment of a camera security system and two years of monthly service. "We have a picture of every car that enters the neighborhood," she said. "I can't say enough about it." She feels that for \$50 per year she sleeps better at night.

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