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## Police: Prevention is key to stemming burglaries in Lamorinda communities

By Cathy Dausman



Security camera image of a car involved in a robbery in Lafayette on March 21st. Photo provided

buys time and allows for help to arrive. Security cameras are also an effective crime deterrent; Nagel updated the Orinda City Council on their use on public streets at the March 21 council meeting.

Lafayette residents experienced an unexplained downturn in burglaries in 2016, said police Chief Eric Christensen. Four years ago the city reported six to 10 burglaries per month. His department handled only three total cases this year in January and February; two are already solved. Still, there is an increased concern about burglaries and crime in general, and that, Christensen says is a good thing:

"Are people paying attention (to crime stats)? Yes!" Home burglaries peak when the price of gold rises; they are also cyclical, Christensen says, increasing when people vacation during summer and winter holidays and homes are empty.

Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda police departments each offer vacation home checks, and will notify homeowners if something is amiss.

Although Christensen, King and Nagel were all willing to discuss statistics and as-yet unsolved cases, they much preferred to educate the public about preventing burglaries. Each shared frustration over the simple things left undone which act as an open invitation to crooks. For example, King said Moraga experienced about 40 auto burglaries during the summer of 2015, each of which occurred on unlocked vehicles. The same is true for residential burglaries. Homeowners may intentionally leave doors unlocked, place a key under the mat for service worker access, open windows or fail to activate burglar alarms.

"The perception is we're living in a bubble (in Lamorinda)," said Nagel, "and it's just not true." In fact the same "location, location, location" that realtors love to tout is also attractive to would-be burglars. They love a home with easy freeway access. An empty house is attractive too, for all the wrong reasons. A home with doors and windows hidden behind shrubbery and insufficient outdoor lighting provides a burglar the cover of darkness and leisure time to break in away from neighbors' prying eyes. Nagel cites one burglary case where the intruder(s) simply walked through an open back door.

Crooks gained entry from the rear of a home in 86 percent of last year's Lafayette home burglaries, Christensen says, so the No. 1 preventative action a homeowner can take is to lock their backyard gates. Not a single home with locked gates was burglarized in Lafayette in 2016. Conversely a previously burglarized house is more likely to be burglarized again.

King, Nagel and Christensen explained that each one of them is in the crime prevention business. "If something can be prevented, I'm a happy camper," said King. "Even one (burglary) is too many for me," echoed Nagel. "California is the land of opportunity," Christensen said, before adding that should not apply to burglars.

For more information:

Preventing residential burglaries (Lafayette police):

Are residential burglaries on the rise in Lamorinda?

"It does seem that way," says Orinda police Chief Mark Nagel, before adding that Orinda's numbers prove otherwise. When Nagel compared statistics for the first two months last year against this year it was nearly "even Steven" he said, with nine reported burglaries in 2016 and eight in 2017.

Burglary, defined as entering a building illegally with the intent to commit theft, is always a hot topic, Nagel said. He says his department has worked with law enforcement agencies from Oakland to the South Bay to solve burglary crimes.

Most frustrating for Nagel are the instances when residents are home or arrive home to confront a burglary in progress, and homeowners are at risk of bodily harm. Nagel said burglar alarms and motion lights are good deterrents; even creating a "safe room" within the house

[www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/city-departments/police](http://www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/city-departments/police)

Moraga vacation check request: <https://secure.blueoctane.net/forms/>

Staying Safe in Orinda:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-hUUzWK3S4&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-hUUzWK3S4&feature=youtu.be)

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