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Moraga PD warns residents about door-to-door solicitations

By Vera Kochan

Within this past month, Moraga experienced a swarm of solicitors knocking on residential doors without the proper permit issued by the Town's police department. MPD received three complaint calls on Sept. 5 from residents located on Devon Drive, Whitethorne Drive, and Selborne Way. While police managed to locate the solicitors from the first two streets, the Selborne Way individual was not found. The resident told dispatch that the male first rang the doorbell and waited for quite some time before he began knocking on the front door so aggressively that the door rattled, all while shouting loudly to attract the occupant's attention. The resident never opened the door, and two hours later the male in question came back using the same tactics. At that point, police were called.

MPD Chief Jon King surmised that this group of individuals was hired by a "company" to sell goods (whether legitimate or not) in well-to-do neighborhoods. They are driven as a group to a location and then disperse on foot to their targets with the promise of hefty commissions if sales are made. Some may claim that they're earning money for a trip, while others say they are selling magazines that oftentimes never show up in the purchasers' mailbox. King said that some may use aggressive tactics out of desperation to make a sale.

Moraga's Ordinance No. 239 requires that anyone wanting to sell door-to-door must fill out a Peddlers and Solicitors Permit Application. An appointment must be made when submitting the application along with Live Scan fingerprinting, having a photo taken, and a background check completed. The permit costs \$125 and is good for one year after issuance. Even with a permit, no soliciting is allowed if a residence has posted a sign prohibiting it on their premises.

Besides the standard personal information on most general applications, the applicant must provide vehicle and business/activity descriptions. Lastly, any criminal record information must be divulged other than traffic violations. When a solicitor's permit is granted, the applicant will receive a laminated permit from MPD containing pertinent information along with a photo of the solicitor that will hang from a lanyard and must be worn in plain sight while soliciting.

"Most companies that target cities to make sales will check out the cities' ordinances," stated King. However, there are those, as mentioned earlier, who don't do their homework, and MPD relies on calls from residences to draw attention to them. After running a check, "legitimate businesses will be told they need a permit. Some will get a warning and won't listen. When that happens our officers will cite them."

Moraga adopted Ordinance No. 239 in early 2013. "It's my understanding that this ordinance came about from an assault that happened in Lafayette involving a solicitor on a female resident," recalled King. In Chapter 9.10.010 - Findings and Purpose, the ordinance states, "The Town of Moraga routinely responds to complaints regarding the conduct and impact of peddlers and solicitors operating within the town who peddle or solicit door-to-door. These complaints have involved misrepresentations or fraud in solicitations or sales, aggressive, threatening and intimidating tactics and the refusal to leave the premises when requested. These complaints implicate the town's interest in protecting the privacy, safety and general welfare of its residents."

King recommends using the services of reputable businesses. "We have a lot of fine local businesses, but we also want residents to know that when someone comes to their door wearing a permit that they have been vetted."

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