

Protecting Home and Hearth

Orinda Police Chief Talks Home and Holiday Safety

By Laurie Snyder



Jeffrey Jennings, Orinda's Police Chief, wants everyone to have a safe and happy holiday season. Photo courtesy City of Orinda

“Safety is knowing your neighbors,” says Jeffrey Jennings, Orinda's Chief of Police. “You are your own best defense.”

That concept is never more uppermost in the minds of Jennings and his officers than during the holidays when many area residents leave home for treasured times with loved ones.

It's important, says Jennings, to give neighbors a heads' up when you are leaving town. There are far more residents than there are police, and neighbors are capable of noticing suspicious behavior much more quickly because they are the ones most familiar with their area's daily routine – who currently has a housekeeper coming in and on what days, who has contractors performing work or regular pool service, or who or will be expecting UPS or FedEx deliveries.

One great way to get to know neighbors, says Jennings, is to form a Neighborhood Watch, but even if you don't have the time or are not a “joiner,” you can still help keep your community safe.

When you know your neighbors, you're in a great position to spot something out of the ordinary for the time and day in your area – a car that has always parked at one house on a Tuesday is now suddenly parking there on a Saturday while the homeowner is away, a worker arriving with someone you've never seen before, an odd experience happens with a delivery or utility visit.

“We're looking for behavior that doesn't fit the norm,” Jennings says.

And call the police dispatch number right away if you see something, urges Jeannette Irving, the Chief's assistant. All too often, she says, residents will phone a day or two after witnessing something, delaying out of fear that they will appear “silly” or “nosey.” By then, it's usually too late for the police to take action.

If residents do see something odd, Jennings suggests that they try to get license plate numbers when cars are involved – but only if they can do so safely. “Use your cell phone camera and photograph the plate or the person.”