

S.C.H.A.R.C.
South Charlotte Homeowners Against Residential Crime
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department

Scanning:

- Late in 2010, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) patrol divisions were challenged to find new ways to reduce crime through community engagement
- Officers in the South Division challenged because they had the highest rate of crime reduction in 2009 and no significant persistent crime hot spots
- South Division has primarily middle to upper income neighborhoods with low incidence of violent crime. Most prevalent crimes are residential burglary and larceny from vehicle.

Analysis:

- Response Area One in the South Division consists of 120 separate neighborhoods; Officers wanted to focus on neighborhoods where they could have the most impact on crime reduction.
- Most crimes were crimes of opportunity; traditional crime prevention and education efforts had limited effect unless crime sprees temporarily attracted attention
- Officers decided to focus on neighborhoods that were off main corridors and where they had established relationships with neighborhood leaders.

Response:

- Officers engaged five neighborhoods in a crime reduction contest.
- Officers held two meetings with leaders and residents of the five selected neighborhoods to select a name for the competition, set goals, choose the crimes to be targeted for reduction, and determine how crime reduction would be measured
- Contest lasted six months from January 1, 2011 through June 30, 2011. Goals were to
 - Reduce Crime
 - Increase Perception of safety
 - Have residents take responsibility for crime reduction measures
 - Increase communication between police and citizens

- Enhance communication among neighborhoods
- Targeted crimes were residential burglary, vehicle theft, and larceny from vehicle.
- Crime reduction measures for the five communities were a per home rate of incidents for each of the three target crimes and scores from a random audit of 25 homes per week in each participating neighborhood to identify crime reduction infractions.
- Winning neighborhood presented a trophy and a sign.

Assessment:

- During the six months of the contest (January-June 2011), 3 of the 5 participating neighborhoods experienced reductions in the target crimes
- During the six months after the contest (July-December 2011,) one neighborhood saw a reduction in the targeted crimes. One remained even and three saw increases; two by only one crime, another by 23 crimes
- In the first three months of 2012, three of the five neighborhoods have experienced reductions in the target crimes and two have remained neutral.
- In a post contest survey, residents of the participating neighborhoods reported perceptions of safety, heightened awareness of suspicious activity, and more willingness to take appropriate safety measures.
- Contest replicated three times

S.C.H.A.R.C.
South Charlotte Residents Against Residential Crime
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department

Scanning

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's crime reduction efforts are focused on reducing crime at the neighborhood level through a high level of police visibility, data driven enforcement and problem solving strategies and engagement of citizens in crime reduction and problem solving. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) experienced significant reductions in crime from 2008-2010 as a result of a departmental reorganization and a focus on the efforts of response area teams in each of the 39 patrol response areas. Despite the crime reductions, in late 2010, Chief Rodney Monroe challenged each of the 13 patrol divisions (each patrol division consists of 3 response areas) to do even more to reduce crime with an emphasis on heightened levels of community engagement.

For CMPD's South Division, the challenge of increasing crime reduction was especially daunting. In 2010, the South Division experienced a 16.2% reduction in crime, the highest reduction in the city's thirteen patrol divisions. The South Division is one of the more unique areas in Charlotte. It is a physically large area of 57 square miles with a population nearing 150,000 residents. The area is comprised of predominantly upper and middle income neighborhoods where the consistent crime problems are residential burglary and larceny from vehicle. Most of these offenses are distributed throughout the division with very few chronic crime hot spots.

Analysis

Sgt. Travis Pardue was the Response Area Commander for the South Division's Response Area One; Officers John Kitchens and Beth Jackson were the community coordinators who specialize in problem solving and community engagement. Response Area One consists of some 120 distinct neighborhoods, many of which are located off of major corridors such as Park Road and Carmel Road. Analysis showed that approximately 55% of the crime in the South Division was residential burglary and larceny from vehicle. The common denominator in those crimes is that they are crimes of opportunity. Residents leave valuables in their cars, leave vehicles unlocked and leave garage doors open, allowing access into their vehicles and homes. Officers Jackson and Kitchens reviewed some of the crime prevention and education efforts they had conducted in the past and found that traditional means of disseminating this information generally had limited impact. The only thing that engaged residents were crime sprees where a particular neighborhood would have a large number of burglaries and/or larcenies in a short period of time. These would get the attention of residents and they would try to be more aware of appropriate crime prevention measures but the effect was short lived. The criminal moved on and residents would soon become complacent again since overall crime numbers were low and there were few violent crimes. Areas such as this are a challenge for police since incomes are higher than the city wide norm and crime numbers are lower than the city wide average. Residents feel safe in their neighborhoods-a positive thing-but become very complacent-a negative thing.

Officers Kitchens and Jackson wanted to find some way to reduce crime in their response area and contribute to a division wide reduction, giving them the biggest bang for whatever efforts

they decided to implement. They also wished to build on existing relationships with community leaders and broaden them to include more residents. The officers worked with the Department's Crime Analysis Division to take a statistical snapshot of their response area and identified six neighborhoods where they thought there were opportunities for crime reduction and where they has strong working relationships with community leaders. The neighborhood they decided to target ran off of major corridors within the division.

Response

The officers did not have to devote much time to deciding on their crime reduction strategy. Officer Beth Jackson is candid about her competitive nature and suggested that she, Officer Kitchens, and Sgt Pardue engage the target neighborhoods in a crime reduction contest for a six month period with the neighborhood achieving the greatest crime reduction declared the winner. Officer Jackson felt certain that a contest would be an innovative way of engaging residents more than they had been in the past and would be a fun way to provide and use crime prevention education. They also felt that a competition would strengthen the relationship between police and neighborhood residents as well as enhance communication within and among the participating neighborhoods.

The officers wanted the selected neighborhoods (Huntingtowne, Montibello, Old Salem / Woodbridge, Park Crossing and Quail Hollow Estates) to be vested in the contest. To that end, the officers developed an outline for the contest and then held two meetings with leaders of the six neighborhoods to get their input on the contest details including the name of the

contest, the goals it would address, the measurements for crime reduction and the prize for the winner.

Leaders from the six neighborhoods were enthusiastic and made the commitment for their neighborhoods to participate. They suggested several names for the contest including NARC (Neighborhoods against Rising Crime) and CRAC Down (Citizens Racing Against Crime) but finally settled on S.C.H.A.R.C. for South Charlotte Homeowners Against Residential Crime.

Brochures and other materials printed for the project featured a logo incorporating a shark and CMPD's hornet's nest shaped badge.

The group endorsed the competition goals of crime reduction, increased perception of safety, and improved communication between police and the community as well as communication within the neighborhoods. The officers had suggested that the contest focus on reduction of residential burglary and larceny from vehicle but, at the request of the neighborhoods, auto theft was added as a third target crime. The decision was also made to combine the two smallest neighborhoods, Woodbridge and Old Salem into one for competition purposes so that there would be five neighborhoods that were essentially the same size. They also agreed on a sign and a trophy as the prize for the winning neighborhood.

The officers and community leaders worked to define how crime reduction would be measured.

They decided that the participating neighborhoods would be gauged on a per home rate of incidents in the three targeted crime categories. In addition, Officers Kitchens and Jackson would conduct a random weekly audit of 25 homes in each neighborhood and would issue infraction points if they found any of the following crime prevention infractions: open garage doors, unlocked vehicles, valuables left in vehicles, and newspapers, packages and dry cleaning

left unattended and in plain view. The neighborhood with the fewest infraction points would be ranked first for the week. The audits could take place any time between 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. The weekly ranks were converted to a weekly score; for example, a neighborhood ranked 1st (lowest) in crime incidents and 2nd in crime prevention would receive a score of three for the week. This scoring method would result in some weekly ties but over a six month period would identify a clear winner.

There were several ways that a neighborhood could offset any infraction points. If a neighborhood held a community meeting or event, they could achieve a reduction of 5 infraction points. Each week, Officers Kitchens and Jackson would randomly contact 5 households in each participating neighborhood to see if they had a list of serial numbers for computers, electronics and other valuables. Those that had a list of serial numbers earned bonus points for their neighborhood. Bonus points were also awarded if residents called 911 in reference to suspicious people or vehicles. Officers Kitchens and Jackson were responsible for conveying the weekly contest results to the leaders in each participating neighborhood who, in turn, would notify residents through newsletters and e-mail blasts.

The contest kicked off on January 1, 2011. On January 8, 2011, a kick-off event was held at the club house in the Park Crossing neighborhood with residents from all participating neighborhoods as well as media representatives in attendance. Several media outlets took an interest in the competition because it was a novel way to engage the community in crime reduction efforts. Media outlets which covered the competition included WCNC-TV, WSOC-TV and the South Charlotte Weekly newspaper. One reporter visited the Park Crossing neighborhood pool on a Sunday to talk with residents about the contest and found that many

of the people there were aware of the competition and trying to do their part in crime prevention efforts.

During the contest, neighborhood leaders would send out e-mail blasts reminding residents of the crime prevention steps they needed to take to help their neighborhoods achieve victory.

Residents would remind each other to take precautions and would check on each other.

Interaction with police intensified and all of the neighborhoods established stronger relationships with their community coordinators. While the contest was labor intensive, it was relatively easy to implement and there were no problems encountered during the competition.

It was also a low cost way to generate community engagement.

Assessment

At the end of the six month contest period, the Park Crossing neighborhood had the largest reduction in crime and was declared the contest winner. A celebration was held at the Park Crossing clubhouse and CMPD presented the sign and trophy to the neighborhood. While a winner was declared, Sgt Travis Pardue said that everyone really won-the neighborhoods, residents and police. One of the best outcomes, besides the drop in crime, was the relationships that were formed between residents and the officers who patrol their streets.

During the six-month contest period, three of the five neighborhoods experienced a reduction in the three target crimes when compared to the six months preceding the contest. Park Crossing went from five (5) target crimes to one (1); Old Salem/ Woodbridge was down from four (4) target crimes to one (1) and Quail Hollow Estates was down from one (1) target crime to zero (0). Two of the neighborhoods experienced increases over the previous six months with

Huntingtowne increasing from one (1) target crime to three (3) and Montibello increasing from one (1) to five (5).

In the six months after the contest, one neighborhood, Montibello, was down from five (5) target crimes during the contest to one (1). Old Salem/Woodbridge was even with one (1) target crime during the contest and one (1) in the next six months. Two of the neighborhoods experienced slight increases with Huntingtowne increasing from three (3) to four (4) target crimes and Quail Hollow Estates increasing from zero (0) to two (2). Ironically, the contest winner, Park Crossing, jumped from one (1) target crime during the competition to twenty-four (24) in the six months following the competition. The significant increase was due to a spree of vehicle break-ins by one suspect who was apprehended. The perpetrator broke into garages and then into vehicles. During his interview, the suspect advised that the neighborhood was a hard target because everything was locked up and there was nothing in the vehicles once he broke into them. It is clear from the suspect's disappointment that Park Crossing residents were still using the crime prevention measures that previously led them to victory.

In the first three months of 2012, three of the neighborhoods experienced declines in target crimes over the previous six months and two are neutral. There were only six target crimes in all of the participating neighborhoods.

Residents participated in two surveys; one midway through the contest and another at the conclusion of the contest, to gauge their perceptions of safety and their attitudes toward crime prevention. The survey was designed by CMPD's Research and Planning Division. Highlights of the survey include:

- Increase in perception of safety from 3.31 to 3.80 on a five point scale

- 76.74% of survey participants reported learning new crime prevention tips as a result of the contest
- 83.33% of survey participants said the contest helped them better assess their risk of victimization
- Survey participants who had made lists of serial numbers increased from 11.9% midway through the contest to 30.2% at the conclusion of the contest
- 83.3% of participants reported they were motivated to increase their crime prevention efforts
- 87.7% of survey participants report being more aware of suspicious activity in their neighborhoods
- 90.48% of survey participants felt the contest was an effective tool to reduce crime in their neighborhoods

Based on the survey results and feedback from neighborhood leaders, participation in the competition was worthwhile for the neighborhoods, instilling lasting crime prevention habits and better communication in the neighborhoods. Park Crossing Homeowners Association President Lang Holding said “We’ve had a lot of comments, a lot of feedback. And the excitement of the fact that we’re in first place has been good for motivation.” Another Park Crossing resident noted that promoting prevention is easy but getting people to understand its importance was more difficult. He felt the contest was a tangible way of demonstrating the value of adhering to what are basically simple common sense crime prevention practices. One of the advantages of a contest of this nature is that it is easily replicated. CMPD’s South Division has already replicated the contest three times. The first was in five more

neighborhoods in Response Area One and the second was in some of the apartment complexes in the area. The most recent adaptation of the contest was at the three high schools in the South Division. The target crime was larceny from vehicle and students were challenged not to keep valuable in plain view in their cars. Random checks of vehicles were conducted at each high school on a weekly basis just as they were in the neighborhoods with the school with the fewest larcenies from vehicle named the winner. The South Division will continue the contests and already has neighborhoods requesting to be included in future competitions. CMPD's Providence Division has also implemented a variation of the contest and more patrol divisions will likely adapt the program for their area.

The idea of a crime reduction contest is simple yet novel. The South Division's efforts have already attracted attention on the national level. Officers Kitchens and Jackson were invited to present their project at the Southern Criminal Justice Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. They were joined in the presentation by Dr. Tammatha Clodfelter who had been with CMPD's Research and Planning Division during the contest and is now a professor at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. In November 2012, Pardue, Kitchens, Jackson, and Dr. Clodfelter have been invited to participate in a panel at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology in Chicago.

As Sergeant Pardue had stated, everyone really won this contest. Crime was reduced and all of the participating neighborhoods learned and adopted the prevention measures necessary to reduce their chances of becoming a victim of property crime. Communications among neighborhood residents were increased and relationships and information exchanges between police and the neighborhoods are stronger. Thanks to the efforts of Sergeant Travis Pardue,

Officer John Kitchens, and Officer Beth Jackson, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department has a new crime reduction and prevention tool that will be easy to implement throughout its jurisdiction. For CMPD, that's a big win!

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Appendix

The appendix contains the following documents:

Page 1: S.C.H.A.R.C. Neighborhood Summary Statistics (2009-2012)

Pages 2 and 3: S.C.H. A. R.C Brochure

Pages 4 and 5: WSOC-TV- New Plan Puts Competition in Crime Fighting

Page 6: South Charlotte News- CMPD to honor top crime fighters

Page 7: South Charlotte Weekly

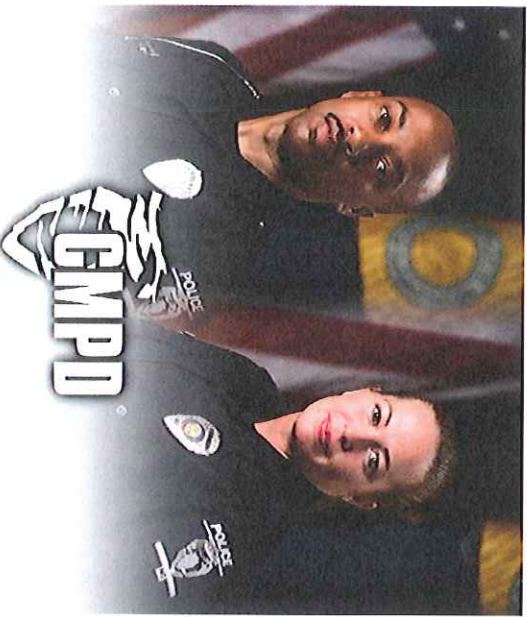
Pages 8 and 9: WCNC-TV- South Charlotte Homeowners Cut Crime in Half

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SCHARC NEIGHBORHOOD SUMMARY STATISTICS (2009 - 2012)

	2009		2010		2011		2012	TOTAL
	Jan - June	July - Dec	Jan - June	July - Dec	Jan - June	July - Dec	Jan - Mar*	
Huntingtowne Area	3	3	3	1	3	4	1	18
Auto Theft			1					1
Larceny from Auto	2	2	2		3	3	1	13
Residential Burglary	1	1		1		1		4
Montibello	7	1	1	1	5	1	1	17
Auto Theft	1							1
Larceny from Auto	5	1	1	1	2		1	11
Residential Burglary	1				3	1		5
Old Salem and Woodbridge	4	3	8	4	1	1	1	22
Auto Theft	1							1
Larceny from Auto	2	3	6					11
Residential Burglary	1		2	4	1		1	9
Residential Burglary-Storage Bldg						1		1
Park Crossing	6	2	6	5	1	24	3	47
Larceny from Auto	5		4			14	1	24
Residential Burglary	1	2	2	5	1	9	2	22
Residential Burglary-Storage Bldg						1		1
Quail Hollow Estates	4	4		1		2		11
Auto Theft		2						2
Larceny from Auto		2		1		2		5
Residential Burglary	4							4
Grand Total	24	13	18	12	10	32	6	115

*2012 TOTALS INCLUDE JANUARY 1, 2012 - MARCH 27, 2012



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Got a tip?
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S.C.H.A.R.C
 South Charlotte Homeowners Against
 Residential Crime

Communities Engaging to Win Against Crime

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There are six neighborhoods that have agreed to participate; two will be combined to make one team. The neighborhoods include Park Crossing, Quail Hollow Estates, Montibello, Huntingtowne Farms, and the Old Salem/Woodbridge communities. We all met on two occasions to determine the name, the goals, and the measurement tools that will be used for the project. The name that the communities have agreed on is: South Charlotte Homeowners Against Residential Crime. The mission statement of the competition is the following: Communities Engaging to Win against Crime. The simple goal is to reduce crime as much as possible within these communities by encouraging and empowering the residents to do the things that we know have helped in reducing crime. Ideally this will foster improved neighborhood communication and police/community communication.

The competition will last six months from starting January 1, 2011. The measurements will involve a dual measurement system.

- 1st, the participating communities will be gauged on a per home rate of incidents that will include 3 crime categories (**Larceny from Auto, Larceny of Auto, and Residential Burglary**). From there, the communities will be ranked -1st= lowest crime rate.
- 2nd, the communities will be gauged on the number of infractions per number of random (25) homes per week. The audits could be at any time of the day. From here the communities will be ranked. 1st = fewest infractions/25 homes
- The weekly audits will include the following items:
 - A. Garage doors open
 - B. Vehicles left unlocked
 - C. Valuables left in vehicles
 - D. Newspapers/ Packages/ Dry Cleaning left unattended

The neighborhood with the least amount of points will be ranked first.

- During the weekly audits if the neighborhood has a community event or meeting they will have a 5 point reduction. We will make contact with 5 separate houses in each neighborhood during the weekly audit and see if those homeowners have a list of serial numbers; this will also be considered bonus points for the week. Bonus points will be also awarded for 911 calls made in reference to suspicious people and vehicles.
- The weekly audits will generate more zone checks and citizen contacts along with more communication between the neighborhood leaders and their residents.
- Officer Kitichens and Officer Jackson will be responsible for the weekly audits and informing the neighborhoods of the outcome each week.

The winning neighborhood will be presented with a trophy and a sign for their neighborhood. We anticipate that this project to continue and more neighborhoods will want to get involved so the sign will move every six months. As we progress there will be a community event planned at the end of the competition.

Item(s) That Were Found:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Garage Door Opener | <input type="checkbox"/> Sunglasses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cell Phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Clothes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CD Player | <input type="checkbox"/> Laptop Computer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CD's | <input type="checkbox"/> Radar Detector |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GPS | <input type="checkbox"/> Camera |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Purse | <input type="checkbox"/> Backpack |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wallet | <input type="checkbox"/> Briefcase |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tools | <input type="checkbox"/> Golf Clubs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jewelry | <input type="checkbox"/> Unlocked Door |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Money | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

One or more of the items checked above are visible and in plain sight in your vehicle. A person can easily break the window of you vehicle or reach into the bed of your truck and take these items. With your cooperation we can form a partnership to reduce the number of larcenies from vehicles in the South Division. Please lock your vehicle and remove or secure all valuables.

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New Plan Puts Competition In Crime Fighting

CHARLOTTE, NC — Police in South Charlotte are looking to prevent crime by starting a competition. This new program started as a result of a string of car break-ins in the South Charlotte area in the fall.

Sgt. Travis Pardue explained: "The ultimate goal is a reduction in crime in South Charlotte."

To do that, Pardue and homeowners from the area came up with a competition among five neighborhoods.

The new program is called "SCHARC" or South Charlotte Homeowners Against Residential Crime.

Cameron Wright with the Park Crossing Homeowners Association said, "By engaging and looking out for one another and partnering with the police department, it really goes a long way in preventing any future issues in the neighborhood."

SCHARC works on a points system. Each week, police will go to 25 houses in the participating communities, knock on the doors and go down a check list.

Homeowners will gain or lose points for things like having their doors locked, serial numbers for electronics and leaving valuables in their cars.

"Crime can happen in our neighborhood and if we do some basic things, it's less likely to happen," said Pardue.

But Ted Miller, who lives in Park Crossing, says promoting prevention is easy, getting people to understand its important is more difficult.

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"A lot of times something of this nature doesn't rank real high until maybe they've experienced some type of problem themselves, and then it becomes very important," Miller said.

Pardue says with this pilot program they hope to gain other teams in the South Charlotte area.

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- Two women charged after newborn baby's death | www.wsocvtv.com (wsocvtv.com)
- Children, all under age 4, witness mother's murder | www.wsocvtv.com (wsocvtv.com)
- Greenpeace protesters arrested at NC demonstration | www.wsocvtv.com (wsocvtv.com)
- FBI works to generate new tips in girl's disappearance | www.wsocvtv.com (wsocvtv.com)

From Around the Web

- Top 5 Mistakes Made By Small Businesses (InkfromChase.com)
- Getting Baby to Sleep By Any Means (Parents.com)
- These 4 Things Happen Right Before a Stroke (Newsmax.com)
- 10 Things You Should Never Buy at Garage Sales (Reader's Digest)
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By Caroline McMillan

South Charlotte News

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Wednesday, Feb. 23, 2011

CMPD to honor top crime fighters

South Charlotte neighborhoods compete, help reduce crime

By Caroline McMillan

The fight for the title of best crime-fighting neighborhood in south Charlotte rages on.

At the start of the New Year, the South Division of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department started a "South Charlotte Homeowners Against Residential Crime" competition between five neighborhoods in South Division's Response Area One, which encompasses the area north of Pineville-Matthews Road and south of Fairview Road.

The inaugural competition, which started Jan. 1 and will end June 30, includes the Park Crossing, Quail Hollow Estates, Montbel'o, Huntingtowne Farms neighborhoods and the Old Salem/Woodbridge communities.

To decide which community is most effectively engaged in reducing crime, CMPD is weighing two factors: the crime rate in specific categories and the number of crime-prevention infractions.

Each week, the neighborhoods will be ranked by the crime rate per home in three categories: larceny from auto, larceny of auto and residential burglary.

The second factor is the number of crime-prevention infractions. CMPD officers will be doing "audits" anytime from 8 a.m.-8 p.m. on a random selection of 25 homes in each neighborhood per week.

Mishaps such as leaving newspapers and packages unattended, leaving a vehicle unlocked or with valuables visible and keeping the garage door open would all count against the community.

Currently, Quail Hollow Estates has taken the lead.

In his February 2011 newsletter to residents, Response Area Commander Sgt. Travis Pardue reiterated that the competition wouldn't have an effect on the routine police presence in the area.

"Rest assured, we will continue to do our regular patrols within your neighborhood as we have during the last two years," reads the newsletter. "Nothing will change in that regard."

The winning neighborhood will be awarded a trophy and a neighborhood sign. CMPD South Division officials anticipate the competition will get good traction in south Charlotte and plan to expand to other neighborhoods and response areas. The sign will move every six months.

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Neighborhood crime competition hits halfway point

Posted by CW Editor on March 31, 2011 in News | 0 Comment

by Mike Parks

The South Charlotte Homeowners Against Residential Crime, known locally as SCHARC, has reached its halfway point with Old Salem/Woodbridge out in front.

The competition pits six South Division Response Area 1 neighborhoods against each other to see who can have the best crime statistics each week. Communities are graded on their efforts in improving crime prevention efforts, paying attention to suspicious people in their neighborhoods and communicating crime trends to their neighbors and the police. Each week, police analyze local crime statistics, such as the number of cars broken into and garage doors left open, to give each neighborhood a ranking.

"With three months left, we're seeing less violations and more people recording serial numbers," said Officer Beth Jackson, who is part of the team leading the effort.

The neighborhood leading at the end of the competition will be named Safest Neighborhood. Jackson said she's already heard from other neighborhoods, including Mountainbrook, about taking part in the competition next time.

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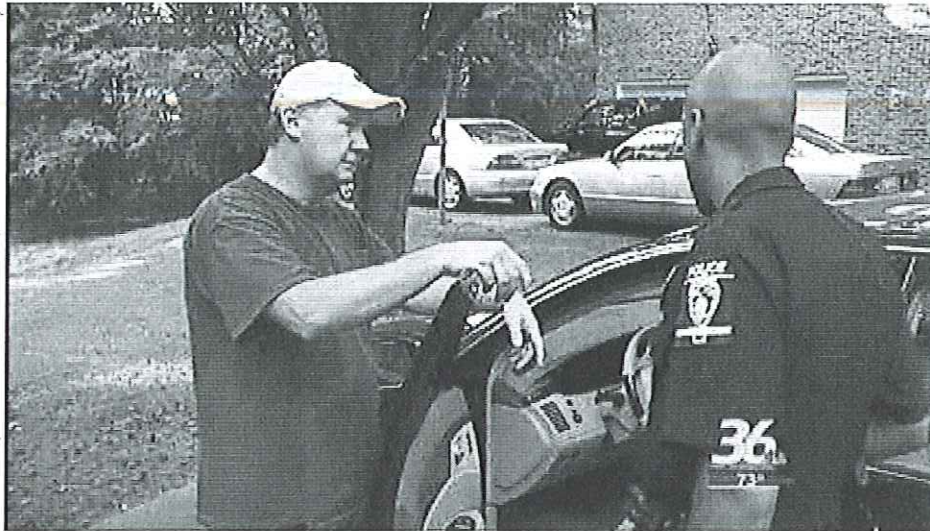
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South Charlotte homeowners cut crime in half



South Charlotte homeowners cut crime in half

by DIANA RUGG / NewsChannel 36

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. -- Some south Charlotte neighborhoods have seen property crimes cut in half after a few simple steps and some friendly competition.

Leaders of the five neighborhoods celebrated the end of the "South Charlotte Homeowners Against Residential Crime" -- or SCHARC -- competition Sunday in Park Crossing, a neighborhood off Park Road near Johnston Road.

Park Crossing competed with Huntingtowne Farms, Montibello, Quail Hollow Estates,

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and the Old Salem/Woodbridge communities to see who could do the best job of preventing property crimes by following a few simple tips, like keeping garage doors closed, keeping cars locked, and storing valuables out of sight in cars.

Community officers like John Kitchens and Beth Jackson would randomly check the neighborhoods and assess "points" when they found garage or car doors open, or valuable items like GPS, keys, or sunglasses in plain sight in the cars. The neighborhood with the fewest points would win.

"We've had a lot of comments, a lot of feedback," said Park Crossing Homeowners Association President Lang Holding. "And the excitement of the fact that we're in first place has been good for motivation."

Park Crossing would send "e-mail blasts" reminding neighbors to follow the tips, and keeping them on top of the points standings. A quick conversation with homeowners by the community pool Sunday confirmed that many of the neighbors knew of the competition and were taking part.

Officer Kitchens said he noticed a big difference in just a few months.

"In January, a lot of neighborhoods were getting negative points because they were leaving garage doors up and leaving valuables in the car," said Kitchens. "In March or so, we started seeing fewer points."

By the end of June, property crimes had dropped by half compared to the first six months of the year before.

"The overall crime rate dropped," said Kitchens. "And some of the neighborhoods in that six month period didn't have any crime at all."

Park Crossing walked away with the overall trophy, but Sgt. Travis Pardue said everyone won -- the communities, the residents, and police. One of the best outcomes, besides the drop in crime, was the relationships created between neighborhood associations and the officers who patrol the streets.

Pardue said Officers Kitchens and Jackson have been invited to make a presentation about it at a conference in Tennessee.

The competition itself, however, moves on to five new neighborhoods -- this time, across Park Road from the old ones. Get ready to close your garage doors, Cameron Woods.