The Elite Arcade: Taming a Crime Generator

by Constable Mike Sheard, Delta, B.C., Police Department

The local teen "hang out" is not a new phenomenon. In the 1990s, many youths choose to gather and entertain themselves at video arcades. There are distinct differences between types of arcades when it comes to crime. Are all arcades crime generators? Some become centers for drugs and crime—crime generators —while others remain relatively problem free.

The police force in Delta, British Columbia, a city just south of Vancouver, spent seven years working on a problem-oriented policing project that began with a single crime-generator arcade in a commercial strip mall. The end result was a reduction in the calls for service, fewer crime problems and the enactment of by-laws for the development of future arcades.

Since the city council adopted these by-laws, new arcades built in Delta are not a burden on the police department or to adjacent neighborhoods, as was this particular arcade. The by-laws generated as a result of this problem-oriented policing project have been implemented in a number of jurisdictions across Canada with similar successful results.

More importantly, an innovative new problem-solving process was developed and tested. The Delta Police Department re-invented the partnership profile in their community and created a strategy that several cities across the country have copied.

SCANNING

In 1988, the Sunshine Village shopping center, a commercial strip mall, was built in an area of Delta with low crime rates. The Elite Video Arcade, located in the mall, subsequently attracted crime and impacted the surrounding businesses and community. Police received increasing calls for vandalism, litter, graffiti, thefts and other criminal behavior.

Reducing Auto Thefts in Coste Verde, Calif.

by Lt. Guy A. Sanger, Officer Michael R. Hastings, Officer Ramona R. Hastings, San Diego, Calif., Police Department

San Diego, the oldest city in California, is situated on San Diego Bay, 110 miles southeast of Los Angeles and about 15 miles from the Mexican border. The city's population has continually increased because of San Diego's superb harbor, beautiful surroundings and its mild, even climate. Situated in the northern area of the city is the University of California-San Diego campus, University Town Center and a prestigious residential community known as Coste Verde,

Auto thefts and burglaries are the number one property crime within San Diego. During 1996, 961 auto thefts occurred within the northernmost part of the city. Of the 961 thefts, 438 (46%) occurred within service area 115, which includes Coste Verde. 1,563 vehicle burglaries were reported within that same area during the same year. This community and the surrounding neighborhoods had the third-highest auto burglary rate in San Diego. No other property crime resulted in more monetary loss for citizens or more out-of-service time for San Diego Police Department (SDPD) officers. The trend had increased in that area for nearly a decade.

The problem was identified initially by commercial store owners, who complained to mall management and the police. As the problem grew, it spilled over into the surrounding residential community, and soon residents signed a petition for city council and police to do something.

The mall was fairly new and had all the outward appearances of a modern, well-kept suburban shopping center. Police were surprised such problems had evolved at this early stage in the mall's life span.

As complaints around the mall increased, crime reports began to escalate. Calls for police service to this mall increased by 47 percent between 1988 and 1989. In 1990, calls increased another 14 percent. Clearly, something had to be done.

The Delta police department tried two initiatives: Operation Blackjack, a surveillance operation and Zero Tolerance, a standard saturation patrol effort. Both of these traditional strategies were largely unsuccessful and not sustainable. A longer-term approach was needed.

I had recently been trained in crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) and was assigned to tackle the problem.

ANALYSIS

I analyzed crime statistics and police reports, conducted on-site interviews, and attended meetings with mall, arcade and community groups.

The problem appeared nine months after the arcade opened, just after the owner changed the internal arcade layout. Originally there were 25 video machines around the perimeter and good sight lines throughout the arcade with few problems reported. Then the owner doubled the number of machines and changed the arcade design so the internal area was filled with machines. This reduced sight lines and made it impossible for staff to monitor patrons or suspected criminals. A new wall also concealed the public's and cashier's view of the arcade.

I reviewed the interior layout using CPTED principles. I found numerous problems, including poor management, lack of proper natural surveillance, no control of interior spaces, and entrapment areas within the arcade. I also reviewed the research on what arcade features work and which features lead to crime problems.

The arcade became a crime generator for the entire mall. At first there was an increase in problems in the arcade itself. But the owners ignored these problems and lost control, and the conflicts between different groups of youths spilled into the parking lot. Drug transactions and sales of stolen property began to occur on the mall premises. At this same time, mall vacancy rates increased as stores around the arcade closed, and the mall began to lose revenue. A security guard service became necessary.

Over a period of three months in 1990, security costs became a debilitating expense for the mall management. Within several weeks, the arcade seemed to have created a crime "market place" that soon spread to the surrounding community. Younger kids not normally associated with crime engaged in drug trafficking, stolen property and nuisance activities.

While CPTED changes and management improvements would be a good first step, I took additional measures to develop public support for future prevention efforts. I attended an open meeting at a local school where police met with 200 members of the community. The public definitely supported police efforts to clean up the arcade.

RESPONSE

The police attempted to convince the arcade owner to correct the problems by removing the extra 20 video machines, pulling down the new wall and replacing original lights that had been removed. The owner refused because of the additional cost, and argued that there was insufficient proof these features were in any way responsible for the problems. "Show me," he said.

I contacted the original mall architects and officials in the municipal planning department, who were both unhappy with the situation at the mall and were motivated to see CPTED work. This arcade, in particular, presented planners with a unique opportunity to establish working guidelines for arcade land-use applications. City officials also decided to monitor more carefully arcade owners' business license renewals.

The police department, mall architects and municipal planning officials decided to conduct a full study of arcade crime. 1 set up a partnership with students studying CPTED under Professor Patricia

Quarterly Calls for Service

	QL	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year's.Total	%Change:
1988	34	28	24	40	126	
1989	26	50	71	90	237	47%
1990	74	49	60	90	273	14%
1991	24	23	22	40	109	-151%
1992	27	20	21	36	104	-5%
1993	34	27	22	39	122	15%
1994	29	19	27	30	105	-16%
1995	29	23	26	36	114	8%
1996	36	22	28	42	128	11%

Elite Arcade

Washroom   Washroom

25 Machine Layout   44 Machine Layout
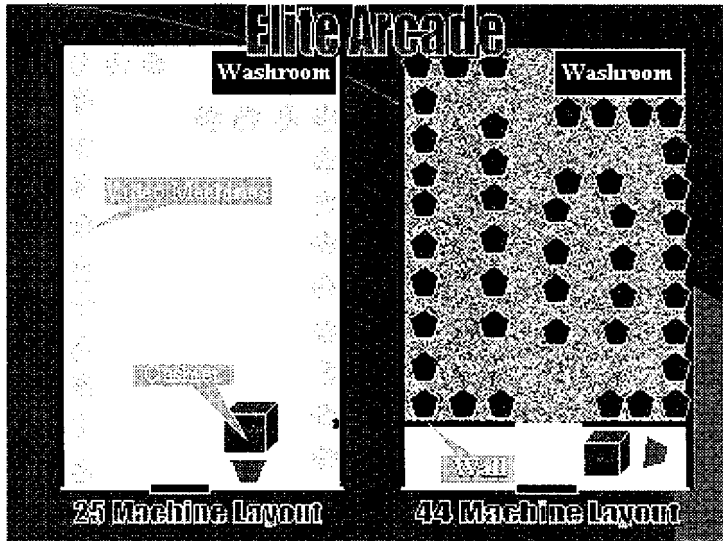
Brantingham, a specialist in environmental criminology at Simon Fraser University. The university study compared the Elite Arcade with two other arcades in the municipality and six video arcades in neighboring cities. The municipal Planning Department agreed to use the data generated by the survey to develop CPTED-based design guidelines.

The study found certain designs accompany low-problem video arcades throughout the municipality. The findings also held true in neighboring cities. The results were brought to City Hall, and the students made a public presentation to the City Council, which was broadcast by a local television company. The arcade owner was summoned to City Hall to hear the study results, after which he agreed to make changes to his arcade.

The results recommended the following changes:

♦ Machines should be set up only around the periphery of the arcade to provide for good visibility.

♦ A clear and open view must be available to the exterior of the arcade. No tinted or reflective film on windows.

♦ Ample lighting must be provided inside the arcade (2 Lux per I.E.S. standards).

Require a parking-stall-to-patron ratio (2:20) to help limit the number of arcade users.

♦ Provide ample lighting for access routes and parking areas throughout the mall (1.5 Lux per I.E.S. standards).

♦ Hours of operation restricted to those of surrounding businesses in the mall.

Where possible, have in-house or contracted security staff.

♦ Rules must be posted and management must take an active role in enforcing the rules.

♦ Limit the number of people in the arcade (Patrons per Floor Space Ration [FSR] as per National Fire Code).

♦ Age restrictions must be enforced with clientele (12-18 years of age only).

♦ Control access to washrooms with locking doors that open only with manager's security key.

After the changes were implemented, city planners and I drafted new municipal by-laws for video arcades in future development. These were adopted by the City Council in 1992.

ASSESSMENT

Once the changes were implemented, crime and police calls for service were reduced by about 150 percent in 1991 and a further five percent in 1992. The mall began to recover commercial viability during the next few months, and was still thriving as of 1997.

The police department anticipated some displacement effects, and those did occur. There was increased activity around local parks, which was easily handled through conventional community-policing responses including recruiting more volunteers for the citizen patrol and heavier enforcement of the park's bylaw.

Some of the kids were also displaced to the local Boys and Girls Club center, as expected. The center provided adult-supervised activities for the youth, and the increased usage raised the community profile of the club. This was so successful that by 1997 there was community-wide financial support for *a* new building and expansion of their services.

Once the initiatives *were in* place, the public demonstrated confidence that they were working. In September 1991, more than 2,000 people signed a petition to City Council that asked to have the video arcade hours extended—they wanted the arcade to operate during the same hours as the other mall stores to accommodate parents dropping off their kids at the arcade while they went shopping.

The arcade owner was also able to use the CPTED study in a local advertising campaign. The promotional material said, "If you could escape for an afternoon to a place that was clean, safe and exciting, would you? Well, you can."

This was a far cry from the arcade owner's original response to police suggestion that a problem existed.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence of the success of the various initiatives was a review of crime statistics. Although the calls for service were reduced by about 150 percent immediately between 1990 to 1991, the actual crime statistics only decreased by one percent during that same period.

However, from 1991 to 1992 there was a 24 percent reduction in reported crimes, and the number of reported crimes has stayed fairly consistently at that level during the past six years.

Call For Submissions of Crime Mapping Case Studies

The Police Executive Research Forum (PERT) and the National Institute of Justice Crime Mapping Research Center (CMRC) are soliciting submissions for a proposed book titled *Crime Mapping: Successful Case* Studies. The *book* will highlight various criminal justice agencies' successes with applying mapping to their problem solving, *prevention* and enforcement efforts and will be a collaborative effort between PERF and the CMRC.

Any employee, contractor or volunteer from a law enforcement or criminal justice agency should submit case studies.

The deadline for submission has bet extended to August 15, 1998. Spc cifi *submission* criteria is available from *Julie Wartell at (2(}2)616 73373 or* through the online submission form on the PERF webs-0 (~vww.pcthcclorum.o).

The planning by-laws provided the sustainability to carry the initiatives beyond the initial police response to the problem. These by-laws arc now enacted prior to development of new arcades, and they can be monitored and enforced by the municipality on a long-term basis.

The by-law proposal, as initially drafted in 1991, included various options for planning development controls. The proposal was followed up with revisions and from 1992 to 1994 the CPTED design recommendations were developed into a final arcade design by-law.

I continued to monitor the situation at the mall and implementation of the new by-law.

In 1995, two new video arcades were built under the by-laws, but data on crime and police calls for service showed the areas around them was not adversely affected. One of the arcades was built in a large regional shopping mall nearby, and from January 1996 to June 1997 only one call was attributed to this location. The mall reported no problems, and surrounding businesses were not adversely affected. The other arcade was located in a nearby strip mall and recorded no calls during the same time period. By 1997, it was clear the Elite Video Arcade project had provided the catalyst for developing a sustainable way to tame video arcades when they become crime generators.

The video arcade by-laws have since become a working model for other communities. During the past two years, municipalities across North America requested copies of the Delta video arcade by-laws, and I presented this project and the resulting by-laws in more than a dozen cities.

Editor's Note:

This project was one of three projects which received an Honorable Mention in the 1997 Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing competition.

SCANNING

Coste Verde covers a square-mile area. The community includes high-end apartments with rent rates starting at $S00 per month and condominiums with a median price of more than $200,000. Most residents are working professionals with an average of two cars per household.

The residents park primarily in unsecured underground parking structures. The apartment and condominium complexes are designed to provide the occupants with privacy and do not allow the parking structures to be viewed from the main street. The layouts of the complexes provide even the most novice of car prowlers the luxury of seclusion.

During August 1996, an abundance of vehicle-related crimes were reported in the service areas in and around Coste Verde. The SDPD conducted neighborhood watch meetings and discovered the community's residents were unaware of the volume of crimes—crime came to the residents' attention only when they became victims.

The Coste Verde area averaged 35.2 vehicle burglaries per month from September 1996 through January 1997. This meant there was a high probability each of the 13,032 residents of the community could be victimized.

The SDPD has a Telephone Report Unit (TRU) at each of its eight commands. The unit is staffed with light duty employees and civilian volunteers. They take reports when no suspect information is available, e.g., vehicle burglaries, car thefts and petty thefts. These cases are generally not assigned to a detective because of the lack of suspect information. During the project's time frame, the Northern Telephone Unit said the bulk of the workload was generated by vehicle burglaries in the Coste Verde area.

The patrol officers and sergeants working in Service Area 115 were informed of the situation. The sergeants, community relations officer, an auto theft detective and the lieutenant met to discuss the problem.

They conducted a day-long training session for the 55 officers working in the service area. The officers were provided with information on how crime can he prevented through environmental design and about services available through the Crime Analysis Department. A portion of the training included examining the car burglary problem and sharing ideas on how to stop vehicle burglaries in the area.

ANALYSIS

The victims and stakeholders included the SDPD, property owners and their man agement companies, insurance agencies, tenants, visitors and guests.

The police department suffered a burden because the large number of vehicle break-ins resulted in a large amount of paperwork and administrative time. A victim would call the Communications center, which would dispatch the incident to the TRU. The TRU would complete a crime case, but without suspect information the investigation would go no further.

We determined the average monetary loss suffered by property owners by examining the Nobel Court Apartments, a 685-unit complex in the Costc Verde area. During the 12-month period before the project began, 15 residents moved out of Nobel Court and stated they were doing so because of vehicle thefts. The tenant loss cost the complex at least $144,000, considering the starting rent was $800 per month and the average lease lasted one year.

The insurance companies that held policies on the victims' vehicles also suffered a substantial loss. The companies lost an average of $1,500 per claim, and, in turn, the citizens of San Diego also became victims as insurance premiums rose.

The SDPD also discovered some insurance companies would not replace stolen interior parts in certain cars. Instead, the companies auctioned the vehicles, and the suspect(s) who originally burglarized the car bought it at the auction. The suspect(s) would then own a car legally, replace the missing parts with the stolen ones and sell the car, in some cases tripling their profits.

The most important victims and stake-holders in this series of crimes were the residents of Costc Verde. To identify the people and habits of the community accurately and to prepare a profile of the type of victims the suspect(s) targeted, the Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol hand-delivered 350 surveys. The results of the survey supported a need for tenant education and showed most tenants had been victimized more than once. Also, the police discovered most repeat victims were not reporting later crimes—possibly because there was no follow-up contact with the victim after the telephone report was written.

The Census of Population and Housing Report indicated that more than 10,000 of the 13,032 residents of the Coste Verde area are caucasian and between the ages of 18 and 44. The average annual income per household is reported to be more than $50,000. But residents only leased apartments for a year, on average, in areas where the vehicle burglaries were happening more frequently.

The lack of continuity made it harder to educate the residents on crime prevention techniques and made it more difficult to foster "neighbor helping neighbor" relationships. The tenants of the area were unable to identify their neighbors or who parked next to them. Onc tenant even suggested he had the right to leave his car phone, pager, computer and any other item inside his car, and it was up to the police to assure the safety of his belongings. The residents of the Coste Verde area were going to be one of the greatest challenges.

The police department evaluated the TRU's procedures and noted several discrepancics. First, the exact location of the vehicle burglaries were not clearly described in the reports. When a burglary occurred within a parking structure with one address, more than 200 cars could be parked in that same large structure. It was critical in the analysis portion to identify whether or not there was a pattern of specific locations in the garages where thefts were more likely to occur. Second, patrol officers and the TRU did not have a direct line of communication. This prevented

the field officers from obtaining information about the extraordinary number of vehicle-related thefts within Coste Verde.

The Crime Analysis Department used data from the crime cases taken by the TRU to identify where the suspects were striking. This reduced the area of concern from 24 large apartment complexes to six.

We also used an executive management survey, which was hand-delivered to the 24 property managers in the Coste Verde area. The survey questions included issues of security, lease and tenant information, communication techniques between management and residents and other important data.

The survey showed the property managers and the SDPD needed to develop a partnership that would align their resources to fight the growing problem. Property managers were not communicating with police or with each other about

the extent of the theft and burglary problem, especially since often tenants would report incidents to the management company and not to the police. The property managers used a wide variety of ways to communicate with their tenants, and those had varying levels of effectiveness as well. Without a solid communication network, different complexes did not know the situation at other complexes; residents did not know their property could be at risk; and the SDPD did not have complete information with which to work.

Police officers used crime prevention through environmental design to evaluate the top six complexes identified by the Crime Analysis unit. Officers walked the complexes during daylight and at night, and discovered the complexes invited burglaries for the following reasons:

♦ There were three main arteries leading into and out of the area: Interstate 5, Interstate 805 and Highway 52. Access to Interstate 5 from the complexes was approximately 118- to 114-mile, giving suspects fast and easy ingress and egress.

♦ Each property had at least two unmonitored, unsecured entrances, which gave suspects an alternate route in case of an unexpected encounter.

♦ The majority of the properties did not have an identification program in place to distinguish a tenant's car from a possible suspect's vehicle.

♦ Lighting was poor, and parking stalls were placed too close together, which concealed suspects.

♦ Most of the residents' cars were high-end Acuras, BMWs, Hondas and all-terrain vehicles such as Jeeps. Statistics indicate these luxury vehicles are at the top of the nation's lists of vehicle-related thefts.

♦ There was generally no street parking available at the complexes. All vehicle traffic, including guests, had to park on the premises. This allowed the suspect(s) drive onto the particular target area undetected, complete the crime and leave.

By studying prior arrests, we determined suspects would drive into the complex and park their own vehicle. They would then walk around the complex and find the particular vehicle they elected to burglarize. Once that vehicle was found, one suspect would commit the crime while a second suspect acted as a lookout. After the crime was complete, the suspects stayed on foot in that complex and looked for another car to burglarize. It was common for as many as 12 vehicle burglaries to be committed in the same complex during a 24-hour period. The suspects did not live in the area and often drove from communities more than 20 miles away.

A few years ago, the division put a suspect apprehension program in place, which had temporary success. However, once the team was disbanded due to staffing constraints, the number of crimes increased again.

Random stakeouts generally yield very little success and require a large amount of out-of-service time for officers. This made it imperative that suspect(s) be identified and follow-up be conducted on all anonymous tips received by the police department.

The Regional Auto Theft Task Force (RA1'1'F) was brought in to assist — although that task force primarily deals with auto thefts, there were related characteristics between the thefts and burglaries in this area.

The RAI'Ir identified a family residing in a home just a few miles from Coste Verde. The family included two brothers who were unemployed, but purchased more than $150,000 worth of salvage vehicles at public auction during 1996. The vehicles they purchased were mostly Acuras, which was one of the top five vehicle types being burglarized in the Coste Verde area.

Unfortunately, while hundreds of suspected stolen car parts were recovered during investigations, they did not have any identifiable numbers leading officers back to a specific victim's vehicle. Victims had to prove there were personal points of identification on the parts found, such as stains, gum or grease. Auto makers could help solve this problem by clearly and permanently identifying removable parts on each car so they could be traced back to their original vehicle.

RESPONSE

The target-hardening portion of the project was the most important. Patrol officers were assigned to each of the six complexes. Those officers spent hours creating relationships with the property managers. After being advised of the high crime rate, most of the property managers told the officers they were willing to form a partnership and take whatever action seemed appropriate to stop the monetary losses. Most complexes implemented neighborhood watch programs and encouraged their tenants to get acquainted with their neighbors.

All six complexes adopted security measures and corrected environmental deficiencies. The corrections included increased lighting, repainting the underground parking structures white for brightness, reducing the number of entrances and exits during peak theft times and securing the property from open pedestrian traffic.

Nobel Court, the complex which lost $144,000 in one year, committed to spending more than $70,000 in security gates and personnel. Another complex,

which had two entrances into its underground parking structure, placed a simple metal bar across one entrance during evening hours and stationed a 24-hour guard at the other entrance. Another complex placed security bars on the open sections of the parking structure to funnel all traffic in one direction.

The Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol, patrol officers and private security firms placed handouts on vehicles found unsecured to help educate potential victims. Police kept property managers up-to-date on the progress of the project, and the managers in turn communicated the information to their tenants.

Patrol officers and the Retired Senior Volunteer Patrols frequented the six locations identified through Crime Analysis at the times of day most active for vehicle burglaries. The TRU members were trained to get the specific location of the crime and marked that location on a large map of the area whenever a victim reported a vehicle burglary or theft. Patrol officers used this map to identify where crimes occurred most frequently.

The department formed an investigative team—one sworn police officer and eight volunteers—to conduct follow-up investigations with each victim. The team remains active; the officer position is rotated every four months so officers gain experience with investigations and working with volunteers.

The TRU provides a copy of each report to the team, who then contacts each victim for an interview and arranges a search of the vehicle for fingerprints. Within the first four months of the investigative team's operation, the volunteer unit obtained information that resulted in the arrest of six suspects.

Through the project, the brothers identified by the RATTF were arrested for several vehicle theft charges and, subsequently, a large, sophisticated ring of vehicle burglars was dismantled. The ring was responsible for nearly 30 percent of the thefts that had occurred in the area dating back to 1994. In executing one of the many search warrants, more than $20,000 in stolen vehicle parts were recovered, and the Internal Revenue Service has now opened a tax evasion investigation into the family.

In response to the results of this project, the National Insurance Bureau is working to educate automobile manufactures on the importance of parts identification. One option under discussion is the placement of a non-removable sticker with the vehicle's identification number on any removable parts.

Officers continue to partner with the property managers and the community, which helps them learn of any problems as they arise. The officers can maintain those relationships while still performing their assigned patrol functions, and this is a key aspect of obtaining and sustaining permanent results from the project.

ASSESSMENT

From September 1996 through January 1997, the Coste Verde community suffered a monthly average of 35.2 vehicle burglaries. After the project was implemented, the monthly average decreased to 15.8 vehicle burglaries from February 1997 through June 1997, or more than a 50 percent reduction within a four-month period. The number of car burglaries decreased more the 45 percent in the 115 service area and more than 39 percent in all the service areas including and surrounding Coste Verde.

We will continue to monitor this area as complexes continue to install security. Monitoring will continue for one year following the completion of the security enhancements. Displacement is also being monitored in the surrounding neighborhoods and has not been detected as of this time.

Farewell to Former Publications Editor

New face at the helm of *PSQ,* subject to Debate

With this issue, *Problem Solving Quarterly* bids **farewell** to former editor Ellen Dollar and welcomes Eugenia Gratto.

Dollar, who served in the position from October, 1994 to April, 1998, has moved on to serve as Director of Public Relations and Events for The Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation, Inc. (OIF) in Gaithersburg, Md. OIF is the only voluntary national health organization dedicated to helping people cope with the problems associated with Osteogenesis Imperfecta, a genetic disorder characterized by bones that break easily—often from little or no apparent cause.

"Ellen was a tremendous asset to PERF during her time here," said Chuck Wexler, PERF Executive Director. "She brought great talent, energy and enthusiasm to the job. We will miss her, but we wish her all the best in her new position."

Gratto joins PERF as the Deputy Director of Communications. She most recently served as Communications Associate at the National Abortion and Reproduction Rights Action League (NARAL) in Washington, D.C. Prior to that, she was a reporter for the *Connection* Newspapers in McLean, VA and for *The Frederick News-Post* in Frederick, MD.

She is a graduate of Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, VA, and plans to complete an M.A. in Writing at Johns Hopkins University in December.

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