

THE VALLEY FORGE/RILEY FAMILY PROJECT ELIMINATING A NEIGHBORHOOD NUISANCE

AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT, TEXAS, 1994

- THE PROBLEM:** Over the past several years, a single residence generated a tremendous amount of calls for police service. Neighbors became frustrated as the frequency and gravity of problems at the residence continued to increase. The complaints involved vandalism, terroristic threats, drug trafficking, and gang activity. Neighbors also suspected that prostitution and child abuse and pornography were occurring in the home.
- ANALYSIS:** All of the reports filed on the residence were analyzed and several neighbors were interviewed revealing that the problems associated with this residence were escalating. Community meetings were held to clarify the nature and extent of the problems. Vice Unit Officers were interested in investigating suspicious activity.
- RESPONSE:** Search warrants were executed; evidence was examined; and suspects and victims were located and interviewed. A nuisance abatement was filed on the residence. The individuals, suspected of child molestation and pornography, were taken into custody. The property was cleaned up and rented to a seemingly nice, stable family.
- ASSESSMENT:** The nuisance was eliminated with the extraction of the Riley family. In addition, public confidence in the police department was increased by completion of the nuisance abatement process and the arrest of individuals involved in child pornography and molestation.
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SCANNING

This POP Project began in November 1993 and was completed in March 1994. It successfully removed a dangerous and offensive situation from an otherwise peaceful, pleasant neighborhood.

The project began when, on patrol in the Edward Sector, Officer Peter Collins responded to two separate disturbance calls on the same

shift involving residents of 828 Valley Forge Drive—the Riley home. During the second call, Collins noticed a woman in a bathrobe standing on the sidewalk across the street at approximately 2:00 A.M..

When approached, the woman's first remark was "I'm tired of this." This neighbor, Darlene Clemons, described the long history of problems at the Riley home. She recounted many calls to APD reporting vandalism, terroristic threats (both of these were sometimes in retribution for neighbors who had phoned the police), drug trafficking and gang activity, in addition to "routine" police visits to the home itself due to

domestic disturbances. She stated that she and many other neighbors suspected that prostitution and child pornography and/or molestation occurred in the Riley home. Collins informed Ms. Clemons that he would investigate the matter further.

ANALYSIS

The next day, before Officer Collin's patrol shift began, he checked the computer and found that over 200 reports had been filed on 828 Valley Forge and the immediate area. Most of these incidents involved situations as described by Ms. Clemons: vandalism, terroristic threats, drug trafficking, etc. At this point, Collins decided to check with other neighbors to determine what their perspectives were and to gather further information.

Collins interviewed residents of six different homes near the Riley home on separate occasions. In each instance, neighbors recounted similar "horror" stories about incidents at the home and expressed profound frustration at having such a nuisance in their neighborhood. They explained that the situation had become worse and worse over the past several years with the growth of Harry Riley's grandsons.

Harry's son, Paul Sr. had three sons, all juveniles (Paul Jr., David and Matthew) who resided for the most part in their grandfather's home. The neighbors had all personally experienced varying degrees of vandalism, which they attributed to these youths, and in many instances believed they were victimized because they complained about the Rileys.

One neighbor was so disgusted with the situation that she had put her home up for sale. (At the conclusion of the project, when the abatement was filed, she decided to remain in the neighborhood and took her home off the market.)

Collins reviewed these findings with Sgt. Lee and Lt. Slaton, stating that he would like to hold a community meeting to discuss the situation with all the neighbors and look for solutions. Collin's superiors agreed, and a meeting was held on November 21 1993 at Darlene Clemons'

home. Twelve neighbors, Lt. Slaton and Collins attended.

Neighbors provided written documentation listing names, addresses, etc. and descriptions of various types of criminal behavior which had been observed or were suspected. They all repeated what Collins had previously heard, and in addition complained of poor fighting on the street, that their "Neighborhood Watch" signs had been stolen, and that the Riley yard stank of urine and was filthy. The neighbors expressed fear of retribution from the Rileys and anger that they did not feel able to walk freely in their own neighborhood.

Collins and Lt. Slaton encouraged the group to "stick together" and explained that in order to solve the problem, neighbors and police would have to cooperate. The neighbors were asked to make notes of suspicious activity, write down license plate numbers, and to assist the police as much as possible. Collins reminded them that they did in fact have the right to the full use of their property, including walking down the street, parking their cars on the street, and spending time in their yards without fear of harassment from anyone.

Within a few days after the Community Meeting, Collins requested a printout from Data Services listing all CAD calls and all reports since 198 related to 828 Valley Forge Drive. He also contacted the Illumination Department, who checked the situation and agreed that a street light was needed at the corner in front of the Riley home (a new light was posted within a few weeks).

Collins and Lt. Slaton ordered new Neighborhood Watch signs. Collins then began interviewing the children of several neighbors who had been inside the Riley home. None of these individuals had been in the home in the past year; due to the increase in problems there, they and/or their parents had ceased visits to the home. However, each of them stated that there was drug usage, violence, and various types of sexual activity going on in the home. They spoke of viewing pornographic photographs, films, and of "common knowledge" that sex and drugs were available there.

RESPONSE

With the vast amount of data on the reports and the information gleaned from discussions with the neighbors and their children, Collins and his superiors believed that serious, continued criminal behavior was occurring at the Riley home.

In mid-December 1993 Lt. Slaton arranged for Collins to go on Special Assignment with the Vice Unit to continue the investigation. Collins met with Vice Officers DeLaSantos and McFadden; they reviewed the information and began devising a plan to issue a search warrant on the home. They conducted surveillance from neighbor's homes, watching the activity, noting persons coming and going, and evaluating the accessibility of the home.

Meanwhile, Collins spoke with other Patrol Officers in the area and advised them that we needed an informant, a youth who spent a lot of time at the Riley home. It did not take long to find one—Officer John Ford called that same day and reported that he had picked up a juvenile at 828 Valley Forge who had been assaulted there.

The juvenile agreed to talk with the Collins and the Vice Unit. The next day, Collins and DeLaSantos interviewed the youth, and based on his statement put together a request for a search warrant of the home for the purposes of locating (child) pornographic materials. The warrant was issued, and that night (12/3/93) Vice Officers, Collins, and SMT entered the Riley home and performed the search.

Among items seized were:

- nude, pornographic photographs of various girls, women, & suspected prostitutes,
- a videotape of David Riley and a minor female having sex in the bedroom of Ms. Riley,

- videotapes of prostitutes performing oral sex on young boys and accepting money,
- various 8mm and VHS hard-core adult pornographic tapes,
- videotapes of drug usage by minors, and
- miscellaneous drug paraphernalia.

Over the next several days, Officers Collins, DeLaSantos, and McFadden examined the evidence and began gathering the names and locations of victims and participants in the videos and photographs. Based on substantial evidence of drug usage and prostitution, Collins began investigating the possibility of having 828 Valley Forge Drive abated. He prepared a summary of the investigation and presented it to Sgt. Bieze and representatives of the City Attorneys office, who felt that the possibility of getting an abatement existed, but much more detailed evidence would be needed.

On 12/15/93, another community meeting was held at the Cameron Road Community Center. Twenty neighbors attended, along with Officers Collins and DeLaSantos, Sgts. Bieze and Lee, and Lt. Slaton.

The purpose of the meeting was to inform the neighbors of the investigation's progress, what had been done and the direction being taken to solve the problem. Officer DeLaSantos gave an overview of the Vice investigation and asked meeting attendees to provide their statements at the end of the meeting so that they could be notarized. Sgt. Bieze explained the abatement process, emphasizing that although more evidence was needed, the possibility of getting an abatement looked promising.

Lt. Slaton and Collins gave new neighborhood watch signs to the group. The neighbors, although anxious about how much longer the investigation would take, were very pleased to see that progress was being made and that APD was "sticking with it." They expressed their commitment to cooperation and provided the investigators with over a dozen statements that evening.

On December 16 1993 with the assistance of Sgt. Burns, Street Crimes Unit, an undercover drug buy was made at 828 Valley Forge Drive. On the following day, a second Search Warrant was issued, this time for both Harry and Paul (Sr.) Riley's residences. Vice Unit officers, Street Crimes Unit officers, Sgt. Burns, and myself executed this Warrant on the afternoon of December 17 1993.

Among the items seized at 828 Valley Forge Drive were:

- videotapes of persons under age 15 engaging in sexual intercourse,
- suspected stolen property including stereo receivers, VCRs, figurines, and watches, and
- drug paraphernalia.

Seized at 1001 Windy Apt. B (residence of Paul Riley Sr.) were:

- a small amount of marijuana, and
- suspected stolen property including stereo and video equipment

On this same date, City Planning and Development Inspectors, who had been contacted by Sgt. Bieze, performed an inspection and declared the home uninhabitable due to electrical and structural code violations. The Rileys were forced to temporarily vacate the premises until repairs had been done.

Again, Collins, DeLaSantos, and McFadden and I went through the evidence and attempted to identify individuals seen in photographs and videos. They had identified several minor females and some prostitutes and were attempting to locate them. Sgt. Lee encouraged Collins to proceed with the abatement process, stating that it would be a good learning experience.

Collins reviewed a prior abatement investigation to see what was needed and began compiling the vast amount of documentation that was

involved. He worked very closely with Beverly Landers and Sonny Hood of the City Attorney's office, who put in many hours preparing the case and were committed to seeing the abatement filed. Collins was advised that in order to obtain the abatement, there had to be proof that the owner of the property had knowledge of what was going on in the home.

Interviews with victims of child molestation and pornography began. Statements were taken from these minors, which told of frequent sexual activity involving the Riley juveniles and also Paul Sr. and Harry Riley. The statements detailed extensive prostitution and drug use in the home, and consistently indicated that Harry Riley and/or his wife, Cloyce were often in the home when these activities occurred.

As of January 1 1994, Collins returned to his regular patrol assignment. He continued to work on the investigation, however, doing paperwork for the abatement during off-hours and often going in to the Vice Unit on days off. He conducted surveillance work on several occasions, attempting to locate individuals involved in the case. Neighbors continued to monitor activity at the Riley home (cleanup and repairs were in progress) and called frequently to report sightings of the Rileys and suspicious activity.

On 1/18/94 another community meeting was held at the Cameron Road Community Center. Twenty-seven neighbors, Collins, Sgt. Lee, Lt. Slaton, and a representative of the City Attorney's office attended this meeting. Again, a progress report was given, and the abatement process was explained. The neighbors were very excited at the prospect of successful abatement but were worried that the Rileys would move back into the home before the process could be completed. Several more statements were taken.

The exhaustive process of interviewing victims, acquaintances, and prostitutes continued. Although on Patrol Duty, Collins was still working during off-hours with Officer DeLaSantos and the City Attorney's office performing interviews and gathering documentation. One of the primary victims was located in a rehabilitation center in Houston.

This female's statement was considered essential to the case since she had been involved in sexual activity with the Riley grandfather, father, and children over a long period of time. Mr. Hood, Ms. Landers and Collins visited her in Houston on two occasions. Her statement, in addition to incriminating both Harry Riley and Paul Riley Sr., corroborated other victim's accounts of sexual assault, prostitution and drug usage in the home.

In order to facilitate completion of the interviews and get the case ready for presentation to the judge, Collins was returned to special assignment and worked closely with Mr. Hood and Ms. Landers.

Finally, in early March 1994, City Attorneys felt that the case was ready to present to the judge. They did so, and were pleased at the judge's enthusiastic reception and recognition of a strong, solid investigation.

ASSESSMENT

A temporary restraining order was placed on 828 Valley Forge Drive, preventing the Rileys from returning to the home. The following week, Harry Riley and his attorney met with City Attorneys and agreed to accept the abatement with no contest. At the same time, felony charges of aggravated sexual assault of a child were filed against Harry, Paul Sr. and Paul Jr., which were based on the statements Collins had taken.

On March 5 1994, another community meeting was held at the home of a neighbor. This was primarily a celebratory event. The neighbors expressed their gratitude to Collins, Sgt. Lee, Lt. Slaton, the City Attorneys office, and everyone involved in finally removing a serious nuisance from their neighborhood. Harry Riley has since rented 828 Valley Forge to a seemingly nice, stable family.