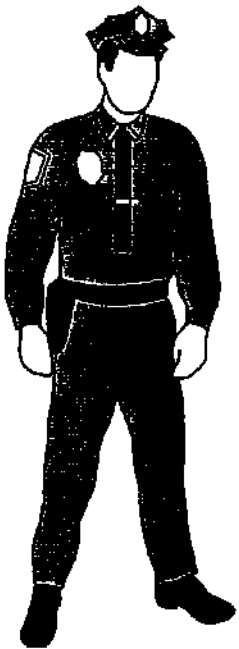


PORT ST. LUCIE POLICE DEPARTMENT



NEIGHBORHOOD POLICING



**PARTNERS III
THE KIDS
THE COPS
THE COMMUNITY**



**DISTRICT III
PROJECT SUMMARY**

PREPARED BY SGT J.R HARSH

The City of Port St. Lucie is located on the Atlantic coast of Florida, approximately 100 miles north of Miami. The city encompasses 86 square miles, and has a population of 72,000 people.

The Port St. Lucie Police Department made a commitment to the Neighborhood Policing Philosophy in 1991. This commitment has continued. In December of 1995, the Port St. Lucie Police Department added two additional Neighborhood Beat Coordinator Supervisors. These appointments created a Beat Coordinator Supervisor to be assigned for each of the three districts within the city. Each supervisor oversaw the daily operations of the 3-4 beat officers assigned to his district. With the span of control at a better ratio, Team Oriented Policing began to develop. Sergeant Jeff Harsh, Officers Rod Dobler, Joseph Diskin and Jerry Errigo became the District III Team Policing Unit.

During the first part of December, the unit began to identify specific neighborhood problems. These problems were confined to a small geographic area within the district.

Initially, these officers began to identify a particular problem at a particular location. As the problem solving efforts continued, so did the realization that this problem was not confined to the Darwin Square Shopping Center, but to a small community within the city district.

This project summary consists of three specific problems that became a large overall problem. The summary identified how the nominating officers were able to adjust their efforts to resolve each element of the overall situation.

I. SCANNING

At the onset of the scanning phase, the nominated officers already knew what the general problem was. Unsupervised juveniles controlling and running rampant throughout their community. The officers were aware of the deterioration within the community, and the quality of life dwindling down.

These problems were identified by the number of previous police calls for service, merchant complaints and citizen complaints.

The problems identified were as follows:

- ✓ #1. The Darwin Square Shopping Center was falling victim to street level narcotic sales, vandalism, graffiti, retail theft, armed robberies, purse snatching, and consumer harassment.
- ✓ #2. The majority of this criminal activity was being committed by juveniles who reside within the community. In excess of 75 juveniles would congregate within the shopping center.
- ✓ #3. The quality of life for the community was disrupted due to the fear of becoming a victim of a crime at this shopping center. This prompted the community to travel elsewhere to do their shopping.

- #4. Business owners complained about loss of business due to this situation.
- ,#5. Public telephones we're being used to receive incoming calls by the juveniles.

I. ANALYSIS

After identifying the problems, the officers began to determine the causation of the problems. The big question was, why did all of the juveniles, 75 plus, find it necessary to use a shopping center as a place to congregate? The shopping center consisted of a video store (no games), auto parts store, Walgreen's Drug Store, a bar & grill, Public Supermarket, dentist office, etc., not a business that would attract juvenile patronage. Approximately one-half mile from the center is a 50 acre city-owned park which was not being utilized.

In checking with the police department record division, it showed that police calls for service, at the shopping center, were juvenile/disturbance-related, and were in excess of 25 per week. This occurred over a one-year period. Further, the retail thefts, armed robbery and purse snatching were committed by suspected juveniles.

The uniformed patrol officers that responded to these calls for service were able to resolve the situation, only temporarily. The juveniles would be dispersed, only to return later. The drug activity would cease during their presence, but resumed when they left.

Upon the conclusion of the Analysis Phase, it was determined by the nominated officers that the following were the causation:

- #1. The lack of after school and evening activities for the juveniles.
- #2. The uniformed patrol officers were not able to concentrate on this particular problem due to continuous calls for service.
- #3. The presence of street level narcotics sales in the shopping center attracts the criminal element. This tends to breed crime, which results in an increase in criminal activity.
- #4. The only pay telephone located within the center was one of the center spots for juveniles awaiting incoming calls.

As a result of identifying the problem, a number of solutions were brought to light.

The first solution was to establish a long-term police presence within the shopping center. The immediate police presence would alleviate the large congregation on a daily basis, and the long-term presence would prevent its reoccurrence. Further, the police presence would interrupt the drug activity.

The second solution was to initiate a narcotics investigation, establish confidential informants, identify the suspect drug dealers, and make the subsequent arrests.

The third solution was to change the pay phones to outgoing calls only.

The first solution, long-term police presence, was established by the nominating officer by obtaining a vacant store front within the Darwin Square Shopping Center, and making it an active District III Substation. The store front identified was a former real estate business that was 1200 square feet, with ample space to accommodate a full staff of officers. On December 1, 1995, the Darwin Square Substation opened, with the three beat officers, their supervisor and support personnel. The substation was also used by all District III Road Patrol Officers, for report writing, interviewing victims and witnesses, follow-up investigations, as well as a location for meal breaks and personal breaks.

This location is donated to the police department by Warmack & Company, Fort Smith, Arkansas, for a minimum of one year to indefinitely.

In the first two weeks of December 1995, the nominated officers were able to accomplish the solution to the congregation problem. These officers actually performed patrolls within the center, talking to the store owners, citizens, and the juveniles. The juveniles were advised that this shopping center was not a "hang-out" and they were no longer welcomed. The majority of these juveniles conceded to our request, and did voluntarily spend their spare time "elsewhere." "Elsewhere" will surface later in the project summary. The remaining juveniles that returned on a nightly basis were there for narcotics purchases.

Even as the congregating diminished considerably, complaints continued regarding narcotics being sold. Information from business managers, laundromat, and Publix Supermarket, and citizens revealed that a "bag boy" (grocery carry-out service person) was selling \$5 and \$10 bags of marijuana while carrying out a customer's groceries to their vehicle.

I. RESPONSE

Based on this information, officers instituted "Operation Bag Boy." The officers began a surveillance operation utilizing the surveillance van, unmarked vehicles, and videotaping of the Darwin Square Shopping Center to identify juveniles involved in dealing narcotics. Officers also utilized the one-way window in the manager's office of Publix, to observe the suspected bag boys. The roof of the Shopping Center was utilized to videotape the juveniles that were congregating around the various stores, and in the parking lot.

During the surveillance operation it was discovered that juveniles were using the laundromat as a lookout. It was observed that a juvenile lookout would stand in front of the laundromat and when the police patrol vehicle entered the shopping center, the lookout would run through the laundromat and the back door, notifying his fellow drug dealers of the police presence. The officers were able to meet with the owners of the

laundromat. After making them aware of the situation, they agreed to prohibit juveniles from congregating inside. This action put an immediate stop to the juveniles utilizing the laundromat as a lookout.

Further, officers were able to identify the two narcotics dealers that were working as bag boys at Publix.

- (1) David McGraw, B/M, DOB: 03/06/78, of 1631 Port St. Lucie Boulevard.
- (2) John Doe, B/M, DOB: 05/20/79, of 123 S.W. Main Street, Windmill Point Villas.

Further, the officers were able to identify the narcotics supplier as a Leroy Wilson, B/M, DOB: 09/29/77, of 329 Tulip Boulevard, Port St. Lucie, Florida. Wilson was supplying marijuana to Doe and McGraw.

After identifying the known dealers, the officers obtained Doe's and McGraw's work schedule at Publix, and were able to conduct surveillance on these individuals while they were working. A warrant check was conducted on the two suspects, and McGraw was found to have an outstanding warrant for Battery.

David McGraw was subsequently arrested on a Battery Warrant regarding an incident with his mother. McGraw was then removed from Publix for failure to show up for work. This arrest eliminated McGraw from the Darwin Square operation, but not from dealing.

The officers then identified and utilized confidential informants to purchase narcotics from the suspected individual.

The first confidential informant was a failure. Officers utilized a juvenile, and it was discovered that he had gone to the target narcotics dealers and informed them that he was working for the police. Two additional persons were identified and agreed to purchase the marijuana from the dealers.

On 12/18/95, a controlled buy was set up at the Cumberland Farms Store at 302 Tulip Boulevard. The officers utilized the two informants to purchase the marijuana from the male supplier, Leroy Wilson. This operation was very successful.

On 01/04/96, a "Buy Bust" operation was initiated by the police officers. Both informants were utilized to purchase narcotics from Wilson. This operation took place, again, at the Cumberland Farms store at 302 Tulip Boulevard. Wilson was arrested and charged with the following:

- 1) Sale and Delivery of Marijuana
- 2) Possession With Intent to Sell
- 3) Possession Under 20 Grams

Officers made numerous attempts to have the confidential informants purchase narcotics from the remaining bag boys at public; however, it was learned that the two suspects had suspected police involvement, and decided not to sell to our informants. Further, the suspects indicated to our informants, that their supplier was arrested, and they were not able to get anymore. Based on this, the officers contacted the parents of Doe (aunt and uncle to McGraw), and advised them of the investigation and their son's and nephew's involvement. Positive feedback was given to the officers by the parents.

The officers were able to change the telephone in front of the video store to only outgoing calls. This eliminated the juveniles from congregating at the corner of the shopping center.

On February 8th, the officers had a grand opening for their sub-station in the Darwin Square Shopping Center. The officers erected "Drug Free Shopping Center" signs throughout the shopping center.

All the merchants in the Darwin Square Shopping Center, along with the owner of the center, George Warmack, have praised the officers' effect in steering away the tide of drug dealers at Darwin Square.

The advent of the police sub-station, along with the constant monitoring by officers, has completely eliminated the juvenile problems at Darwin Square.

However, as mentioned previously, "Elsewhere" had begun to surface. The majority of the juveniles who congregated in the shopping center have now moved to their own housing community, known as Windmill Point.

The problem had only moved from one location to another. The nominated officers again, began to focus on the problem.

II. SCANNING

During the month of January, 1996, an increased concern developed in the 200 block of S.W. Cherry Hill Road over a large group of juveniles congregating on the street. Opinions from specific board directors of the Windmill Point Homeowners Association feel that they are being targeted by the black youths as the people responsible for the recent arrest of a black male juvenile and other related racial problems. Racial retaliation was rumored to occur against these members. After conferring with members of the board of directors, and having knowledge of the juvenile situation on Cherry Hill Road, specific problems were identified.

The first problem identified was the lack of recreation activity available for the juveniles in the community. The second problem was that there appeared to be a barrier built between homeowners and renters. The renters are primarily black residents, and the homeowners are mainly Caucasian. This situation appears to be the beginning of racial tensions.

II ANALYSIS

Jay Gillory, president of the Windmill Point Homeowners Association was contacted, and a meeting was arranged to discuss the mounting problems. After meeting with Mr. Gillory it was agreed that one of the major factors for the juveniles congregating was that the juveniles had virtually nothing to do after school hours and on weekends.

It was also learned that the Homeowners Association had a completely built full court basketball and tennis court, which had been locked for a number of years. According to Mr. Gillory, these facilities were only open to homeowners who paid a clubhouse fee. If the fees were not paid, no resident — neither homeowner or renter — could use the courts.

II. RESPONSE

Based on this information, Officer Dobler and Sergeant Harsh requested that the homeowners association change their policy governing who can use the recreational facilities. Due to new board members taking office this year, the possibility of the change would be greater.

Mr. Gillory was advised that this current situation is not only a police problem, but largely a community problem that the community and its leaders cannot ignore or refuse to solve the problem. The quality of life within the community is at risk, and the community and law enforcement must work together for a resolution.

Officer Dobler and Sergeant Harsh requested a meeting with the board of directors. This meeting took place at the District III office.

The issues to be discussed were as follows:

- Is it a police problem?
- Is it a community problem?
- Police/community partnership.
- Board of directors are the community leaders.
- Leadership must be preset.
- Quality of life.
- Preventing neighborhood deterioration.
- Idle minds/hands equal criminal mischief.
- Homeowners Association responsibility to homeowners and renters.
- Restore recreation facilities.
- Establish an activity director.
- Establish rapport with juveniles.
- Community involvement.

On February 5, 1996, a meeting with the Windmill Point I Board of Directors took place at the Darwin Square substation. Present at this meeting were Sergeant Harsh and Officer Dobler, and six members of the Windmill Point I Homeowners Association Board of Directors. Sergeant Harsh and Officer Dobler made a presentation to the board covering these issues. The issues were discussed at great length, and upon completion of the meeting, the members of the board agreed to the following:

1. Make a commitment to establish a partnership with the police department, and work together to resolve the juvenile situation.
2. To open the community clubhouse to all residents within the community, and allow them to utilize the facilities.
3. To allow the District 111 officers to develop, organize, and implement a community basketball league.

After obtaining the support from the board of directors, the next step was to conduct another presentation to the entire homeowners association.

The homeowners meeting was scheduled on February 14, 1996. Representing the city were Sergeant Harsh, Officer Dobler, and Crime Prevention Officer Janelle Yakuben. Gerry Melville, James Mobley and Reggie Henderson from the Parks and Recreation Department attended, as well.

The presentation commenced with Sergeant Harsh making his opening statement regarding the quality of life issue, the prevention of neighborhood deterioration, and explaining the desire to establish a police/community partnership where we work together to resolve problems.

Officer Dobler continued with the presentation by speaking about the implementation of a community basketball league. Officer Dobler covered the following topics:

1. The Port St. Lucie Police Department's District III officers will develop, organize, and manage the Windmill Point I Community Basketball League.
2. The league will be open to all juveniles in the age groups of 7-11, 12-15, and 15-17, who reside in the Windmill Point I community.
3. The district officers will obtain a sponsor for each team by getting the local merchants involved, i.e., Darwin Square Shopping Center.
4. Registration dates will be identified and flyers circulated to every home in the community.
5. Have an opening day ceremony with a kick-off game between the police and children participating.

Gerry Melville also spoke to the group supporting our program and offering assistance in resurfacing the basketball court and replacing the nets. In addition, two members from Parks and Recreation will be assisting us in the actual program itself. Upon completion of the meeting, it was a unanimous decision to approve this project.

Upon approval, the first step was to obtain sponsors for each team. A letter was drafted to all merchants in Darwin Square Shopping Center. This letter outlines the program. The second step was to identify a vendor for the uniforms. The third step was to design a flyer indicating dates and times for age groups and a contact telephone number, and a registration form was designed. The fourth step was to distribute these flyers to every home within the community.

Through the efforts of Sergeant Harsh, Officer Errigo, and Officer Diskin—who walked throughout the complex and spoke with the residents—a flyer was placed in every doorway within the Windmill Point community, 300 homes.

As of February 29, 1996, we had nine confirmed sponsors and a vendor that would provide us with a basketball uniform shirt at a low price. The first date for registration was on March 15, 1996.

During the month of March 1996 the juvenile problems continued with numerous complaints being filed in the Cherry Hill and Massey Lane area.

The basketball league is now in its final stage, with 65 children registered and eight coaches identified. Eight team sponsors have been selected, and the remaining sponsors have assisted in supplying the much needed equipment. For example, Team Sports Exclusive, Inc. supplied all of the basketballs, scorer, time clock, horn, first aid kit, water cooler, etc.

Each team sponsor selected their favorite NBA team name to appear on the team uniforms, along with the business (sponsor) name on the back. For example, Walgreen Heat, Vision Care Nuggets. In addition, the league schedule was finished, along with a complete league roster and a skills assessment sheet.

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

During the month of April 1996, the juvenile problems on Cherryhill Road diminished considerably. The usual congregation of juveniles in the Cherryhill Road and Massey Lane are appeared to be non-existent.

On April 13, 1996, the basketball league held a skill assessment phase, where each child was judged on his basic basketball skill level. Each child was scored by all of the eight coaches. Upon the conclusion of this assessment, the coaches met at the Darwin Square substation, where a draft or team selection was made. A total of 65 children were assigned to eight different teams.

The opening day ceremony commenced on April 27, 1996. All the teams were announced and the children lined up in center court.

The ceremony concluded with the Neighborhood Policing Officers challenging the kids in a basketball game. The final score was KIDS 24, cops 23.

The season began on Tuesday, April 30, 1996.

II FINAL ASSESSMENT

On April 30, 1996, the Windmill Point Basketball League commenced with its first game. During the month of May and June, there were eight games scheduled for each week — a total of 64 games played for the season. Each game played was supervised by either Sergeant Harsh, Officer Dobler, Officer Diskin, or Officer Errigo.

The homeowners association assisted with each game by opening up a concession stand, selling hot dogs, soda, candy, etc. Attendance for those games averaged approximately 50 children and adults, on a game basis.

During the first week of the games, there were specific juveniles who had not signed up to play; these were the core of the Darwin Square Shopping Center, and Cherryhill Road and Massey Lane problem. These juveniles approached Sergeant Harsh and Officer Dobler, and asked to sign up and be placed on a team. The juveniles were accepted, however, specific grounds rules were established. One rule was, they were not to congregate in the Cherryhill and Massey area, or Darwin Square. A violation of any of these rules would result in being removed from their team.

Towards the end of the first week of play, juveniles from as far away as Jensen Beach, and as near as Parks Edge Community, wanted to register to play. Approximately 50 youngsters were turned away.

The financial status — monies raised by the officers — reached \$1,525.00. This money went towards the purchase of over 60 uniforms and salaries for two referees. The referees were paid \$10.00 each per game; \$80.00 per week, \$320.00 for the month of May.

The sponsors were recognized for their contribution by their business name being printed on a 4" X 8' banner, which was placed on the basketball fence.

Upon conclusion of the first half of the season, and during the month of May, the following goals have been attained:

- A partnership between the community of Windmill Point I and the police had been established, where we come together to solve a community problem.

- The quality of life within the community has greatly improved, since the inception of the basketball league. Large community gatherings around the basketball court and the clubhouse is now an every evening event. The parents are getting to know one another, as well as the sixty plus children playing the sport. The community leaders — board of directors, homeowners association — are now a familiar face within the community.
- The police calls for service from the period of April 1, through May 31, 1996, in the Cherryhill Road area concerning juvenile complaints was **ONE**. Prior to the start of the basketball league, there were 15 to 20 calls per week in this area. See printout from St. Lucie County Dispatch Accounting System.
- The community leaders have already established an activities director, and a street hockey program will follow the basketball program.

The community clubhouse and all of its outdoor facilities are now open to all residents within the community.

- Darwin Square Shopping Center is a flourishing shopping center with virtually no juvenile complaints.
- The street level narcotics dealings are non-existent in the shopping center.
- Major crime, armed robbery, purse snatching, battery, are also non-existent.
- The substation has a full staff of officers and citizen volunteers who occupy the substation for 12-16 hours per day, six days per week.

CONCLUSION

On February 10, 1996, U.S. Senator Robert Graham came to Port St. Lucie to learn, first-hand, about community policing. Senator Graham worked a full 8-hour day with the nominated officers, visiting Darwin Square Shopping Center, and the community.

Senator Graham reported his findings to the U.S. Senate Committee in Washington, D.C. In his statement, he emphasized that Port St. Lucie Community Policing "works."

See supporting news articles.

John Doe is a fictitious name due to Florida Law limiting the release of suspect juvenile names.