

THE BIG STAR MOTEL***BY******OFFICER MICHAEL A. MOORE******FRESNO POLICE DEPARTMENT
SOUTHWEST DISTRICT P.O.P. TEAM*****ABSTRACT:****SCANNING:**

The "Big Star Motel" is located within the Southwest Policing District in the City of Fresno. It has been the source of major problems to the citizens, and Police for decades. The identified problems include: Murders, Assaults, Drug Sales, Drug usage, Prostitution, and overall blight.

ANALYSIS:

We determined that many of these problems seemed to contribute to many other problems. We found that many of subjects contacted or arrested at this location were either under the influence of an illegal substance or, in possession of illegal narcotics paraphernalia.

Prostitutes would often reside with suspected drug dealers at this motel. They were also renting rooms at this location to date "Johns", to obtain money for drugs.

RESPONSE:

Our plan was to hopefully break the cycle of problems at this location, by addressing the root source. Our goal was to reduce problems we were facing in the areas of excessive calls for service and excessive crimes. Also to reduce or eliminate the negative impact on citizens and businesses in this area.

The critical element of this plan was to establish a level of accountability, for the owner and manager.

After each confirmed unlawful incident, I made personal and written contact with both the owner, and manager to make sure they were aware of these on-going problems.

After several months, we concluded that no efforts were being made by management to effect positive change at this motel. Citizen complaints, calls for service and overall crime in the area continued to escalate.

ASSESSMENT:

The results of our actions were extremely positive. During the administrative hearing the motel owners attorney decided to offer a plea agreement, rather than continue with the hearing. They offered to closed the business and to maintain that status until they sold it within 120 days. We agreed to this offer, but with a few additional conditions.

Prior to this action, problems at this location were out of control. We had two Drug related homicides within three months. In December of 1996, Officers handled 103 calls for service for that month alone. Since this action, calls for service have been almost completely eliminated. For the last eight months we have not had more than 3 calls for "service.

The business has since been sold. This has allowed us to place condition that will prevent this location from reverting to its prior problematic status.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION:

1. The Fresno Police Department has established five Problem Oriented Policing Teams throughout the city. Each team consists of ten Officers, and one Sergeant. This project was addressed by Officers assigned to the Southwest P.O.P. Team.

2. Yes. Every Officer and Supervisor assigned to the P.O.P. Team receives a minimum of forty hours training. Training was received before this project was assigned.

3. No, Other than recognition received from the supervisor of the unit.

4. Officers are trained in the principles of Problem Oriented Policing, and S.A.R.A. In addition, Officers are encouraged to be creative in designing the response to a project and to go outside the normal boundaries. (Reference material: Problem Oriented Policing by Herman Goldstein).

5. Drugs, Prostitution, Disturbances, Assaults, Murders, and community blight.

6. This project was assigned to Officer M. Moore. Due to the magnitude of the problems, other Officers involved included Tactical Officers, Patrol Officers, Vice and Narcotics Detectives, Homicide Detectives, Burglary Detectives, Code Enforcement Officers, Fire Inspectors, business owners and citizens in the area.

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Fresno Police Department

Southwest POP



Fresno, California

Using POP Principals to impact major crimes.

Officer Michael A. Moore

INTRODUCTION

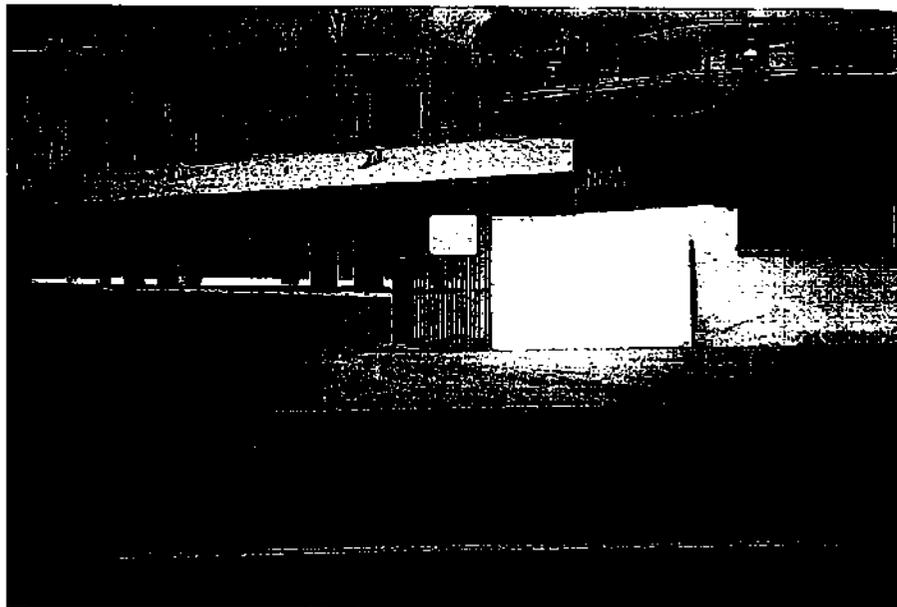
The goal of this document shall be to illustrate how Problem Orienting Policing (POP) principles were implemented to address major problems, and serious crimes. The results of this project were significant in that we were successful in reducing crimes, calls for service, and blight. We were also successful in improving the quality of life for the citizens and business owners in the area.

The Big Star Motel is located in the Southwest Policing District in the City of Fresno, specifically located at 2325 S. "G" Street. This motel has thirty-rooms, and was constructed in 1938 as an office complex. It was modified into a motel in 1955 (see pictures on page #2). The 230(1 block of "G" Street is adjacent to Golden State Blvd. which was once State Route 99 (see picture #3, page #3). State Route 99 was once the major North and South highway through the City of Fresno, and through central California. This highway was decommissioned as a State Route in 1957, and at that time this property was returned to the city to be used as a city street. The area surrounding this project includes several light industrial complexes, with some residential living space in the various area motels.

After this Highway was decommissioned and this roadway was turned over to the city, the surrounding area suffered due to it becoming somewhat by-passed geographically, economically, and developmentally. For several years, many more businesses moved out of the area, than those that moved in.



The Big Star Motel
is located in the Southwest
Policing District in the City
of Fresno.
Originally an office
complex modified to a
thirty-room motel in 1955.





The "City Motel" is located just north of the "Big Star Motel".



View of "G" Street North.

Golden State Blvd.
(Old Highway 99) on the left side.

One of the first problems that became apparent after these changes took place was the influx of prostitution. The 2300 block of "G" Street, which includes the Big Star Motel and several other smaller motels, became known for the prostitution trade. This entire area became a popular spot for prostitutes traveling and working the "west coast circuit". The 2300 block of 'G' street became known as "the 'G' street stroll".

After prostitution had established a stronghold in the area, other problems began to come into play. In the early 70's marijuana and pills were the dominant drugs of that era. In the early 80's powder cocaine and heroin were the drugs most often found in this area. In the late 80's and today, rock cocaine has become the drug of choice. The influx of these drugs contributed significantly to adverse impact on the community and the Police Department. Calls for service and crimes continued to escalate. There were dramatic increases in assaults, homicides and property crimes.

SCANNING

Problem Orienting Policing was introduced in the City of Fresno in 1992. It was first implemented in the Central Policing District. This concept was initially implemented as a pilot program to test the effectiveness of the principles of Problem Oriented Policing. Once the benefits of this program were confirmed, the P.O.P. concept was implemented throughout the five policing districts of the city.

In May of 1994, Problem Oriented Policing was implemented throughout the five policing districts in the City of Fresno. It was at this time the Southwest POP team was formed. A short time after the Southwest POP team was assembled, a POP project was created for this location. At the onset, the goals of this project were to address the excessive demands for Police services in the form of calls for service. In addition, this project was established to address the increasing and ongoing citizen's complaints regarding the problems in the area.

I joined Southwest POP Team in December of 1996. A short time after I arrived, I was assigned to this project. I reviewed data from the crime analysis unit and confirmed that drugs and prostitution continued to be the dominant symptoms of the problems. To this point, traditional tactics had been used to impact the problems, which resulted in very little long term effectiveness.

One year total calls for service:.....230

One year total reports written:.....78

ANALYSIS

After reviewing the POP file, it became apparent that traditional methods alone did not have a significant long term impact on the problems. I requested and reviewed additional statistical data from our Crime Analysis Unit, and conducted an in-depth review of that data. Once again, drugs and prostitution were confirmed to be the dominant symptoms of our problems.

In an effort to obtain additional information regarding the problems, Officer Louie Sanchez and I canvassed the surrounding half mile area, contacting business owners and workers, regarding the existing problems. We solicited their assistance in identifying and addressing their problems.

From the business owners and managers, we learned that drugs and prostitution have been problems in this area and location for last 20 to 30 years. I was also told that for the past 10 to 15 years, the Big Star Motel is believed to be nucleus for those problems. Several of the business owners complained that the criminal activity in the area was affecting them, their employees, and their customers.

Prostitutes frequently approached and harassed employees and customers as they traveled through the area. Drug users were commonly arrested or suspected of having committed various thefts in the vicinity. Suspected drug dealers were commonly involved in verbal and physical disturbances. Many times these disputes involved firearms, or other weapons. Many of the disputes involving these subjects resulted in serious injury, and the loss of life.

I contacted the patrol officers who commonly work this area, and respond to the calls at this location. I solicited their input on the problems, and their input on addressing those problems. From this contact I confirmed information that I had received from other sources. The Big Star Motel was apparently the major source of the problems, and it was the main location where incidents and problems were occurring.

Additional information was obtained through speaking with the business owners and the officers. Both related their belief that the owner and the manager of the Big Star Motel were catering to the prostitutes, drug abusers, and drug dealers. We were told that the manager of this motel commonly rented rooms to drug dealers at a much higher rate, (from \$150 to \$250 a night). Rooms at this motel usually rent for approximately \$20.00 per night. These rooms were rented with the owner and managers full knowledge that the persons intended to sale and/or distribute drugs from them.

I was also told that prostitutes were being allowed to rent rooms at the Big Star Motel to date their clients. We were told that the prostitutes were being charged by the manager, \$5.00 to \$10.00 for each date she brought in.

With all of the above information, our mission became clear. Our goal was to design a strategy to address and respond to the underlying causes of these problems, rather than just the symptoms. Our plan in addressing these problems, was to pursue them at the source. We focused on the management of the motel, rather than continuing to deal with just the symptoms, ie: the drug dealers, drug abusers, and prostitutes.

RESPONSE

We were encouraged to reach beyond the normal parameters in creating responses to our projects. The latitude given to us by the administration of our agency, allowed us the freedom and flexibility to consider several alternatives in designing our response. We also attempted to

design our response to address both the individual symptoms, and the overall problems. Our primary goals were:

- 1.) To reduce the amount of calls for service and crimes.
- 2.) To reduce the incidents of narcotic sales, narcotic use.
- 3.) To reduce or eliminate illegal prostitution in the area..
- 4.) To improve overall the blight in the area.
- 5.) To improve the quality of life of our citizens, by reducing crimes.

With those goals in mind, we designed our response plan utilizing the benefits of both traditional and non-traditional tactics. We continued our aggressive stance with regards to prostitution, and drug violations. In addition, we directed our efforts towards the management and ownership of the property. Our objective with regards to the motel management, was to either gain their voluntary cooperation towards correcting the problems, or to take action that would force them into compliance.

At this point we were confident the root source of this problem was identified. A major contributing factor to the problems was the friendly environment by ownership and management of this motel, to those who would involve themselves in illegal activities. With that in mind, our strategy was designed towards addressing the project by focusing on the management and ownership.

At the beginning of our response, I contacted the manager and the owner of the motel, and requested to meet with them. They were advised that purpose of the meeting was to discuss

the ongoing problems at their business. This meeting was held on April 29, 1997, at the Southwest District Office. The owner and manager were present, as was the Area Commander at that time, Lieutenant R. Martin, POP supervisor, Sergeant Pat Farmer, and myself. Up to this point, the owner and manager maintained that they were doing all they could to combat and prevent the problems at their establishment. We solicited their input in identifying the problems, and we also requested their input in identifying solutions to address those problems.

We also informed the owner and manager of our perceptions of the problem, and what steps and/or changes we believed would be beneficial towards resolving them. We made it clear that it was now necessary for the "owner and manager" to take an active role in correcting the multiple problems. We also advised them to take steps to effect some positive changes at their establishment. Prostitution, overall crime, and drug problems at this location would not be tolerated. We advised them we would continue to be available to assist them in addressing the problems, and advised them that their efforts to correct the problems need to be consistent, and on-going. Finally, we advised management that failure to take corrective or preventive measures would result in an administrative action against the establishment.

Our goal in holding this meeting was to put the manager and owner on notice, that they were responsible for the activities at their establishment. We advised them of their responsibility to implement some changes to improve conditions at their business. We informed them that our goal was not to target anyone undeservedly, but to restore this area for the safety, security, and enjoyment for the law abiding citizens who lived and worked in the area.

After this meeting, we continued to use both traditional and non-traditional tactics. We continued to arrest prostitutes, drug dealers and drug users at this location. In addition, after each subsequent arrest or search warrant I personally contacted the owner and manager to advise them of the ongoing problems. We also reminded them of their obligation to implement corrective action.

For several months there was no appreciable difference in regards to calls for service, crimes, and problems in the area. It became apparent that management had done nothing to improve or change conditions. We continued to receive citizen complaints, and we were able to confirm that drugs were still being sold from numerous rooms at this motel. Prostitutes were still utilizing numerous rooms at this location to practice their trade. . . . • •

During this period, approximately (10) narcotic search warrants were served at various rooms at the Big Star Motel. Those investigations all occurred within a few short months. Overall, crimes and calls for service continued to increase. Assaults and property theft crimes in this area were still being reported. In addition, shootings, assaults, and disturbances remained at unacceptable levels. In addition, there were two drug related homicides which occurred at the Big Star Motel in just over two months.

On 4-5-97, at approximately 12:18 am, Officer C. Coleman was off duty and on his way home. As he traveled Northbound on Golden State Blvd., he was surprised and shocked when he discovered the body of a male adult in the roadway. The investigation later revealed that the victim had been shot while fleeing from a room at the Big Star Motel. He was said to have been involved in an argument with a drug dealer who chased the victim, and then shot and killed him.

On 6-9-97, at approximately 4:27 am, Officers were contacted by a citizen near the Big Star motel. This citizen told the Officers that there had been a murder in room #10. When Officers investigated, they found a 25-35 year old female, deceased due to an apparent gun shot wound. During this investigation information was received to indicate that the victim was a prostitute, and a drug abuser. She was murdered by her boyfriend, who was said to be a drug dealer.

On 7-31-94, an additional murder was investigated at the Big Star Motel, in room#20. The results of that investigation confirmed that another suspected drug dealer, shot and killed a male adult.

In December 1996, the calls reached an all-time high of (103), for that month alone. Calls for service remained at an unacceptable level for several of the following months. This confirmed that nothing substantial was being done by the ownership or management to address the ongoing problems in the area.

Due to this lack of effort, in May of 1997, a document was drafted and forwarded to the City Development Department requesting the revocation of the rooming tax permit. Copies were personally delivered to the owner and management of the Big Star Motel on June 13, 1997. The contents of this document basically stated that we were requesting the immediate revocation of the rooming tax certificate for the Big Star Motel, located at 2325 S. "C" Street, pursuant to the

following Municipal Code Sections:

We requested this revocation pursuant to Municipal Code Section MC Section 6-108(f), which states: *"The Controller is authorized to suspend or revoke any permit issued pursuant to this section for any one of the following reasons:*

- (1) "For a false statement of material facts contained in the application;*
- (2) For failure to operate such business in accordance with the regulations applicable thereto under the provisions of this Code and the laws of the state;*
- (3) For the conduct of such business in any manner which endangers the public welfare, or for knowingly permitting or aiding and abetting the carrying on of any unlawful activity on the premises for which the permit was issued;*
- (4) For the continued employment of a person previously convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude after notice from the Controller that such person has been so convicted. "*

Also, Fresno Municipal Code (FMC) Section 9-909 which is titled Unlawful Nuisances, states: *"It is hereby declared a public nuisance and a violation of this article for any person whether owner or agent, lessee, sublessor, sublessee, or occupant of any premises in this city to knowingly permit, after being advised, the use of the premises in such a manner that any one or more of the activities or conditions described in the following subsections habitually occur or remain thereon."*

Subsections:

- (a) *"The illegal sale of controlled substances and other illegal drugs and substances which creates a public nuisance as defined in Civil Code sections 3479 and 3480.*
- (b) *The gathering, or coming and going, of people who have an intent for purchase or use controlled substances on the premises.*
- (c) *The occurrence of prostitution. "*

As stated, the document requesting this revocation of the rooming tax certificate was delivered to the owner and the manager in June 1997. There were still (59) calls for service at this location for that month. In the following month, July, there was a dramatic decrease in calls for service to (11). In July, the date for the administrative hearing was set. Both the owner and manager were notified. Since that notification, a dramatic decrease in calls for service has been realized, as there has not been more than (3) calls for service in a month. Calls for service have remained at an acceptable level during the past ten months.

The owner chose to close this business, during the time that the hearing was pending, apparently in an attempt to show a good faith effort to address the problems. These reductions have remained constant for the entire area, even though this business has been sold and reopened. The following graph illustrates the reduction in calls for service from August of 1996, through May of 1998. (see page #).

The Administrative Hearing was held on January 6, 1998. Prior to the hearing, copies of all of the evidence and documentation were delivered to the motel's owner, and his attorney.

Prior to the first witness being called, the attorney for the motel owner requested a brief recess to discuss a possible settlement or plea agreement. During this recess, I spoke to the city's attorney, after he met with the owner's attorney. He explained that the owner offered to sale the business within 120 days, and offered to keep it closed during that period.

We agreed to those terms with the additional conditions that the business not be sold or transferred to a business associate, family member, or friend. We also requested that the business was to remain in its current status, being essentially closed with no rooms rented. Finally, any violations of the terms of this agreement or further problems, would be grounds for the immediate reinstatement of this hearing.

During the implementation of this response, several additional resources were utilized, including the following: the housing and code enforcement officers were used each time the POP Team officers responded to this location, in order to address substandard housing in blighted conditions. The Fresno City Fire Department was utilized on occasion to inspect this property and confirm that the buildings met the Housing Fire Code standards. Our patrol officers, who were responsible for responding to calls for service, were contacted and advised to route any additional contacts or problems at this location to this officer, for further reference and follow-up.

The business owners and managers in the area, wrote (8) letters detailing the negative impact they were being subjected to. These letters included descriptions of past observations and incidents, concerning problems they faced, and details on how the problems impacted their

businesses.

Our officers were also encouraged to continue their aggressive stance with regards to the enforcement of anti-prostitute ordinances as well as drugs, pimping, and property crime type investigations.

ASSESSMENT

The overall results of our combined efforts were extremely positive. As I stated previously, the Administrative Hearing was held on January 6, 1998. This establishment was made to remain closed for 120 days, pending the sale of the property. We placed additional conditions on this agreement, to prevent problems from reoccurring.

At the conclusion of the 120-day period, we received notification that a sale of the property was in process. This has allowed us the opportunity to review the applicant's background, and to place conditions on the application that will prevent the location from returning to its prior problematic state. Our results continued to be extremely positive, as the property was transferred to a new owner in May 1998. Since August 1997, there has not been more than (3) calls for service in any month.

I recently re-contacted several of the business owners and citizens in the area regarding the impact that this project has had on their businesses. The feedback received was that crimes are on the decline, and the quality of life for themselves, their employees, and their customers

has been significantly improved. They have advised us that drugs and prostitution are no longer dominant in this area. It has become the exception rather than the rule to see pimps, prostitutes, and drug dealers.

The goal of this project was to improve the quality of life for the citizens and employees who live and work in this area. Another goal was to reduce the demands for police services at this specific location. To this point, those goals have been accomplished. The calls for service and quality of life have been dramatically improved. This project will continue to be monitored to assure that these benefits will be long-term. Our goal is that by maintaining this presence, the benefits and effectiveness of the efforts that have already been put forth will not be lost. We would also hope to ensure maintenance of the community through the implementation of conditions placed on the new owners, by use of a conditional use permit

We have also maintained contacts with the owners and managers of the other motels in this area. We advised them of the problems they would potentially face if their establishments became problematic. To this point, these motel owners have been very cooperative. They have expressed their willingness to work together to improve and maintain their community.

This project has been a huge success and has been an example for other POP teams in Fresno to Emulate.

Fresno Police Department

Southwest POP

Calls for service analysis: August 1996 ~ May 1998

2325 S. "G" St. / The Big Star Motel

