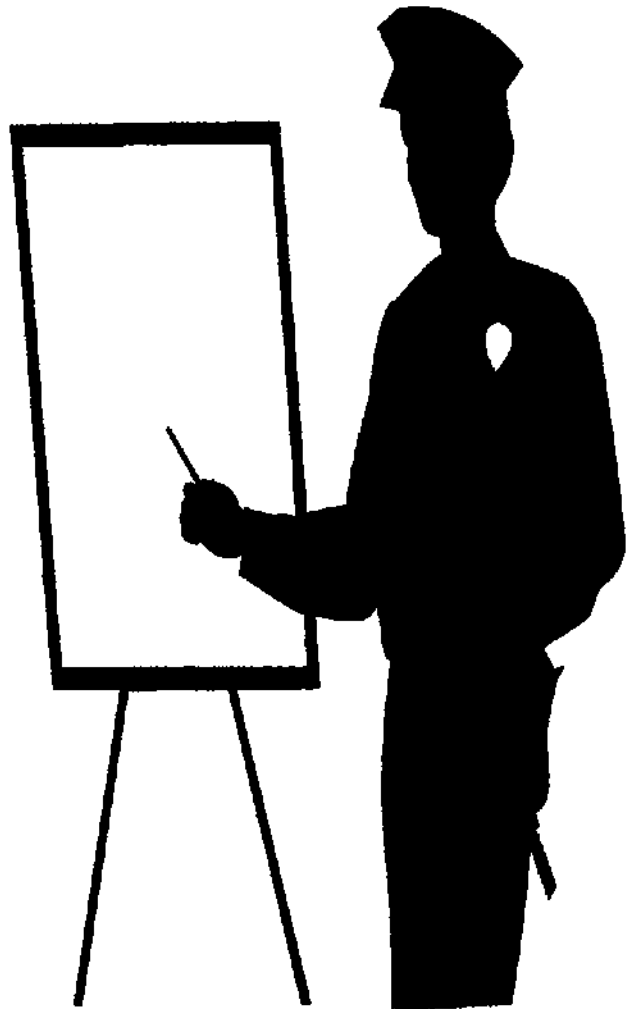


PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING AT WORK

By Officer Jetai Haiike
Juliet Police Department



The problem on Oneida Street began as a simple problem tenant complaint from a first-time, absentee landlord but developed into a three-year project. The result was the closing of a four-unit apartment building for six months, and the dispersion of a concentration of problem tenants. The project was opened in March of 1996 when the landlord complained about a tenant who was having loud parties, disturbing the neighbors and had friends loitering around the building. Upon investigation this tenant turned out to be a drug dealer, upon whom a search warrant was quickly served and eventually evicted. This tenant was to be the first of many evictions from the building due to police incidents.

The continuous drop and then subsequent rise after a few months of calls for service indicated that the problem was more extensive than initially estimated. Problems began to escalate and as soon as one problem was solved another would surface. After numerous meetings and discussions with the property owner, it became apparent that the landlord had no control over his building, and chose to remain unaware of the daily incidents. During the three years I worked on this project the same problems would reoccur and the landlord had still not learned to manage his building or take responsibility for it.

A multitude of methods was applied, but individually failed to conclusively reduce the nuisances this property was causing. It was only on a collective basis that the tools that were used in this situation were effective. Once neighbors were organized, other officers recruited, the cooperation of other City Departments attained, and the attention of the Assistant City Manager obtained, the property owner began to learn that his inattentiveness would not be tolerated.

The City of Joliet is located approximately forty miles southwest of the City of Chicago. Founded in 1833 along the Desplaines River, residents created an urban area whose economy depended upon manufacturing. Many different factories made Joliet their home, and utilized the river as a method of transporting goods. Our city slowly grew over the decades into a working class town. As the nation's economy shifted from manufacturing to service, Joliet suffered severely. At one point in time in the 1970's, the unemployment rate was the highest in the country. Many residents either abandoned their homes, or sold them for a fraction of their value to people interested in dividing them up and renting them out.

Today, our local economy has made much progress towards recovery. The unemployment rate is down, housing starts are at an all-time high, and the population keeps growing by leaps and bounds. Unfortunately, many of the homes that were poorly subdivided are eagerly rented out to persons strongly associated with criminal activity for small sums. These homes remain hot spots for drugs, gang activity, and a variety of other criminal behaviors.

I was assigned to this area as a community-policing officer after receiving several weeks of specialized community policing and problem solving training from my sergeant. As with all officers assigned to the Neighborhood Oriented Policing Team, my job eight hours a day is to patrol and perform community-policing activities in a relatively small area.

This is the Cathedral Area, located on the near West Side of the City. It is a



mostly single-family residential community, and contains a variety of housing stock, much of which was built in the nineteenth century. The home styles range from the ornate Queen Annes,

Italiantes, and Four Squares, to the more middle-class Colonials, Bungalows, and Prairies. The pride that craftsmen took in their construction is evident in the details of old-fashioned front porches, beautiful woodwork, and stained and beveled glass windows. Many of these homes have achieved landmark status.



While community residents met and formed both a preservation society and a neighborhood watch program, residents intent on causing difficulties were populating



other homes within the neighborhood. As the cathedral area neighborhood officer, I started my first project quickly after being assigned to the area. Although a strong neighborhood watch group helps to keep the crime rate low, some problems began to arise stemming from rental properties

located on the Southeast corner of the neighborhood. These properties are flanked by neighborhoods that contain predominantly rental units.

Scanning: The Property Owner Comes to Me

In March of 1996, one of the rental property landlords brought the initial problem to my attention. He explained that he had only owned the building a few months, and was having problems with a tenant who lived in the building when he bought it. It seems that the tenant was

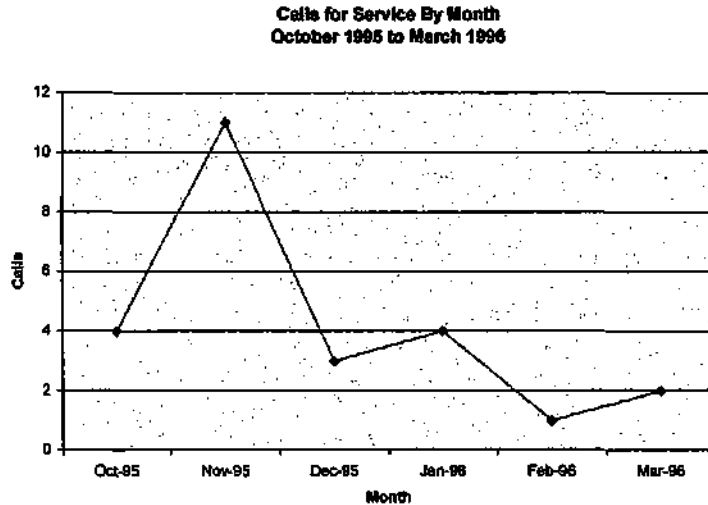
having loud parties, disturbing the neighbors, and many of his friends were loitering around the building. The landlord was at a loss as to what

his options were, and how he could resolve the problem.

When asked about the terms of his lease with the tenant, he stated that he had a monthly verbal agreement with his tenants, reasoning that he could get rid of problem tenants easier if necessary. Unfortunately, he found this to be an inaccurate assumption.

Analysis: An Overreaction?

My first act was to vigorously patrol the area, noting any suspicious or unusual activity. Many times I noticed teenagers loitering, but the problem did not appear to be serious at any given time. Thinking that the first-time landlord was perhaps exaggerating the problem, I contacted him, and set up a meeting.



Response: A Meeting with the Property Owner

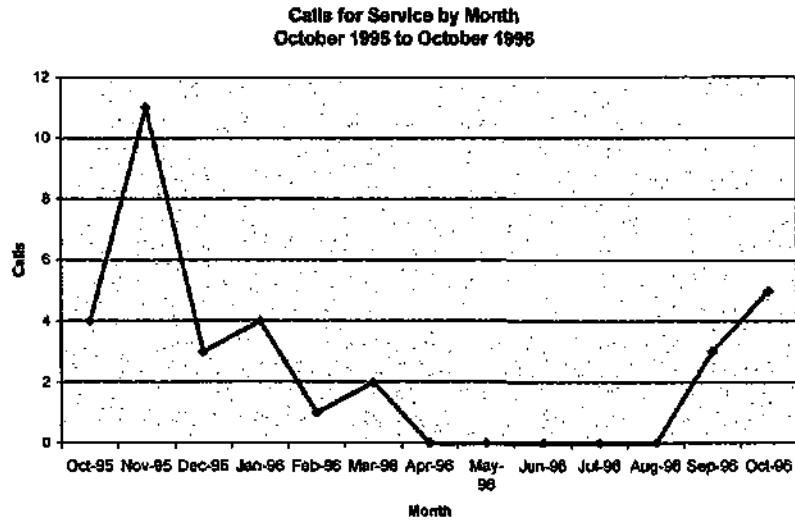
I provided the landlord with copies of standard rental leases created by the City attorneys, and instructions on how to develop agreements with tenants. These forms are normally provided free of charge to any property owner in the City. Beyond the standard information, the leases include a visitation policy, which allows the landlord or his representative to ban problem visitors from the property.

The landlord was also asked to sign a "trespass agreement" with the Police Department. This problem-oriented policing tool has been instrumental over the past several years in maintaining order with problem rental properties across the City where gang or other criminal activity is present. It essentially gives the police authorization to arrest trespassers on the landlord's property and sign complaints against them without involving the landlord or having him present. The agreement has been very instrumental in controlling illegal activity on rental properties, and reducing the ability of gang members or drug dealers to "take over" a neighborhood. In order to implement the trespass agreement, however, the City requires that the landlords use either the City lease or have a similar visitation policy in their own written lease.

Rescanning and Analysis: An Underestimation on My Part

The owner of the property in question did not get the leases signed, so the trespass agreement could not be enacted. Things seemed to calm down throughout the summer, and then the problems began to creep up again. Neighbors began to complain about the building maintenance, the noise problems, and traffic, and calls for service began to increase. Noticing that the problem may be slightly more serious than originally

anticipated, I began surveying the neighbors. Their input was very enlightening. They told me about cars stopping in the alley for a few minutes at a time, garbage overflowing the dumpster and being scattered throughout the alley, and general noise disturbances. I assured them that I would speak with the property owner.



A Stronger Response

At a meeting with the landlord, I suggested that the garbage be picked up twice a week. Soon after that, he complied. I also began to involve other city departments in the property maintenance issues. Neighborhood Services building inspectors were notified, and an inspection was conducted. They found several areas that contained violations, and warned the owner of possible fines. A follow-up inspection was scheduled.

I also conducted more stringent patrol in that general area, I became suspicious that one tenant was selling drugs from his apartment. In response, I combined efforts with the Tactical Unit and other Patrol Officers. One subject was arrested with cannabis that he purchased from the problem tenant's apartment. With the cooperation of that subject, a search warrant was served and the tenant was arrested with 306 grams of cannabis, a handgun, a shotgun and over eight hundred dollars were seized.

Since the trespass agreement option did not seem to be feasible, I decided instead to utilize the City's abatement process. This process was developed in response to the multitude of drug and nuisance problems that occur at rental properties throughout the City. Properties are generally identified through drug incidents or excessive calls for service (identified as more than three in any given month).

Once a property has been identified with a problem, officers attempt to work with the property owner to develop mutually satisfying solutions. In some cases, this may involve helping him evict problem tenants, or assisting him in improving the appearance of the property. If the solutions suggested are not sufficient, or the problems persist, the owner is served with a notice to appear at a City hearing.

At that time, the property owner is asked to improve the problems with several possible solutions with the proviso that their rental inspection certificate will be revoked for non-compliance. Many times this is not necessary, and property owners are very willing to implement any suggestions. In addition, most landlords are unaware of the problems their properties are causing because they are absentee landlords and do not live in the city.

Since the property in this case was involved in a drug search warrant, the landlord was served with a drug abatement letter. He was notified of the fact that his property was determined to be a source for the illegal distribution of drugs, and that a tenant was arrested in the service of a search warrant. The landlord was also notified that if he did not take action to eliminate the drug problem his building could be seized upon a repeat incident. The property owner was asked to attend a hearing with city officials.

During the hearing the landlord was assigned three tasks by the Deputy City Manager and City Attorney:

1. Evict the arrested tenant;
2. Get the leases provided to him signed by his tenants, and;
3. Sign a trespass agreement with the police department.

The property owner was notified that non-compliance on his part would result in the revocation of his rental certificate. His building would then be forcefully vacated. In addition to these tasks, the landlord was also given a date for re-inspection of his property by Neighborhood Services. He was given a list of all violations, and asked that they be corrected by that time.

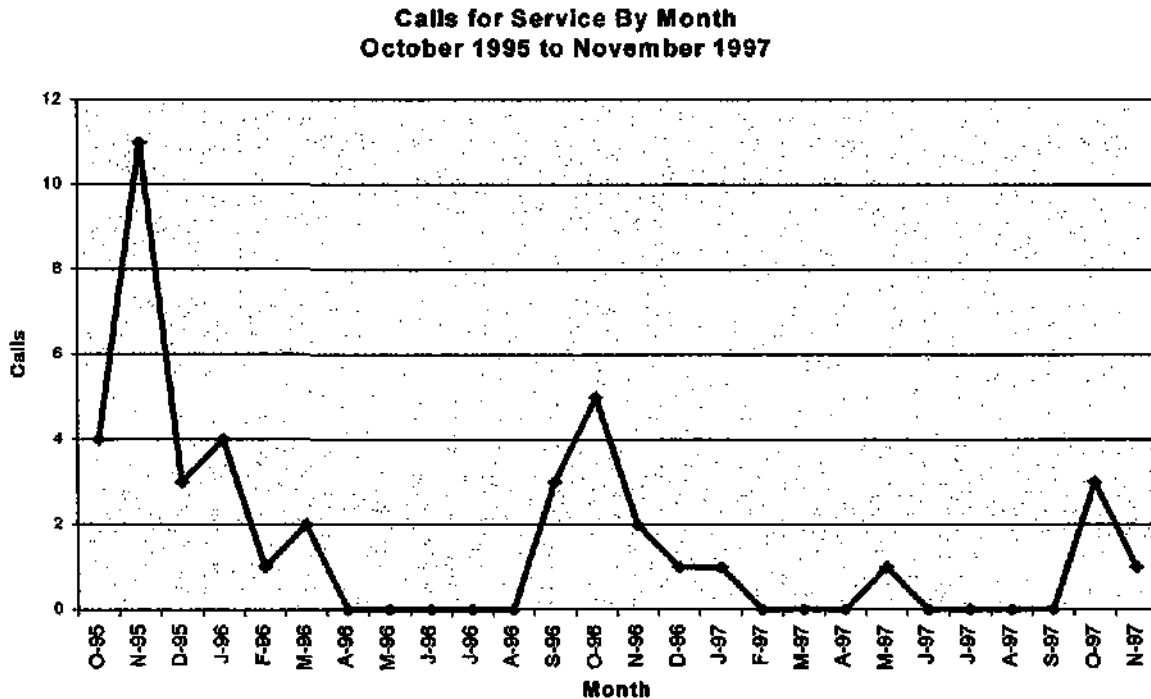
Reassessment

A few weeks after the hearing, the property owner assured me that he had procured leases from all his tenants, and evicted the problem tenant. Unfortunately, a quick survey of some of the tenants revealed that this was not true. I confronted the landlord and found out most of the tenants were employed by him at his restaurant. I then explained to the landlord his responsibilities as a property owner and that the Police Department was not in a position to act as his building manager.

In December 1996 the building was reinspected by Neighborhood Services and passed. I lost some leverage against the landlord when I could not use property maintenance problems to revoke his rental certificate if needed, but I was still hopeful that the problems would subside now that the owner was taking some responsibility for the property.

Reanalysis: The Problem Emerges Again

The building was somewhat quiet for about six months, and then complaints started again as evidenced by an increase in police calls for service. I confronted the landlord again and explained to him that I could not enforce trespassing on his property correctly without the trespass agreement signed and I was not going to let him sign it until the leases were signed. The landlord finally got the tenants to sign the leases and a trespass agreement was signed with the Police Department.



This seemed to address the problems, and calls for service decreased again. Neighbors reported minor incidents during the summer of 1997, but most calls for service did not affect neighbors. Instead, they mostly involved new tenants that moved in. The following spring saw three new tenants move in. Two were in their early twenties and the other was a working mother with two teenage boys and a seven-year old son.

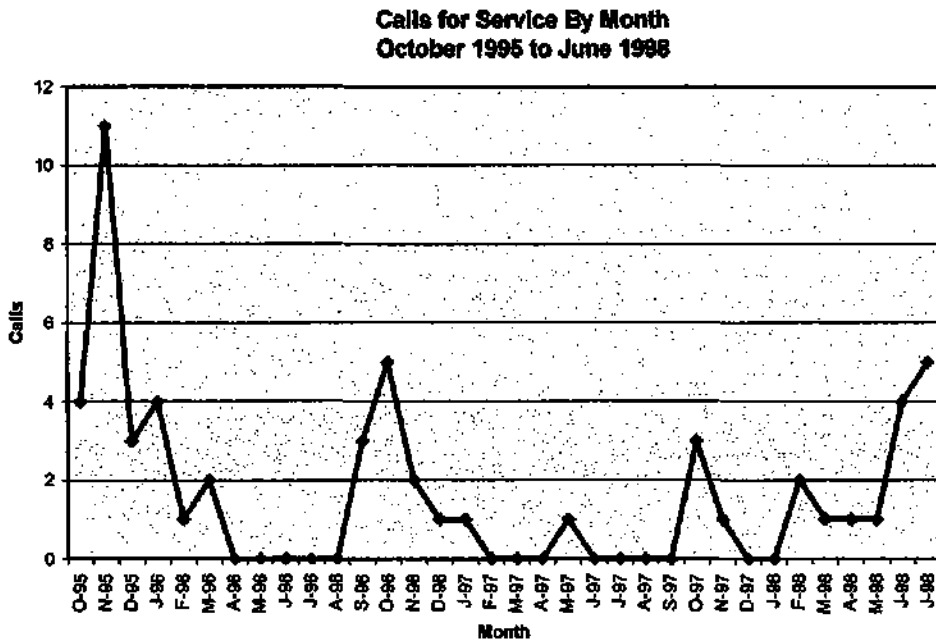
Neighbors began to report loud parties with underage drinking and drug use. It was difficult, however, to catch the underage drinkers and drug users since the occurrences would either initiate within the apartments, or move quickly inside once I arrived.

Responding Again: A Community-Centered Tactic

I responded with a special neighborhood watch group to focus on the building and the problems. With the cooperation of neighbors the police started enforcing the trespass agreement and banning problem visitors from the property. These efforts were still not sufficient, so the landlord was told he had to take some measures to control his tenants. During a call of a loud party in one of the apartments we found a fifty-pound cylinder of

nitrous oxide.

The landlord was notified and responded by successfully requesting the tenant to move out. At this point, I came to the



conclusion that the landlord was unaware of the incidents and problems and was completely satisfied with this arrangement. His inertia would only be broken when the

City forced him to make changes. Meanwhile, the City, Police and neighbors were tired of the whole situation.

In July 1998 I responded by serving the landlord with a nuisance abatement letter, which ordered him to a hearing in front of city officials to answer for the problems his property was causing the City and the neighborhood. At the hearing, the owner was ordered to evict the problem tenant, which had already been done by my suggestion. The fact that the landlord employed most tenants was also brought up during the hearing, since I believed this was part of the problem. I noticed that the landlord had little involvement with the building when the employees lived there.

The landlord was ordered to begin tenant screening through the Police Department, including any tenants that may also be his employees. He was reluctant to do this, however, because some of the employees living there were illegal aliens.

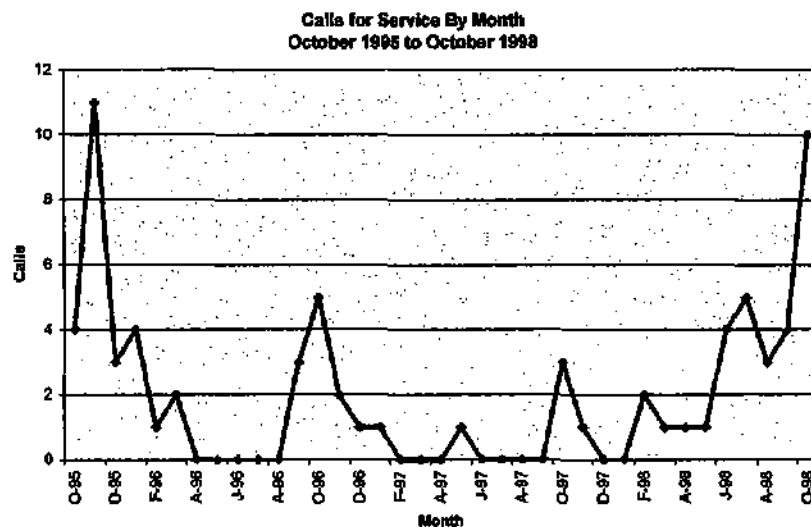
I also brought up the issue of property maintenance issues, as they were getting worse. There were piles of rubbish behind the garage and around the building, graffiti on the garage, the garage was leaning towards the alley and all the doors were missing or broken and several windows in the building were broken. An inspection was ordered to address maintenance problems. The landlord was then advised by the Deputy City Manager of his responsibilities as a property owner. He was told in no uncertain terms that if he could not fulfill these duties, then he should get out of the property rental business. I was sure the landlord got the message this time.

From July 1998 to October 1998 a joint effort by all three Patrol shifts, the neighbors, the School Resource Officer and myself responded to stop the problems. Officers enforced trespassing, noise complaints, and juvenile problems. Patrol officers

were provided with tenant lists to identify trespassers. They were also kept informed of the one tenant's criminal activity, which resulted in his arrest for numerous incidents. Yet this tenant still refused to move. He saw the building as his domain and was adamant that no one could change that, not even the police.

Extra patrol was ordered on the building and the area as many neighbors feared retaliation for reporting incidents. The neighbors began to report drug activity such as residents and guests smoking marijuana and seeing them with guns. Again police could

not confirm or make any arrests based on this information. The landlord was asked to evict the main problem tenant and he stated he has tried but the tenant refused to leave until forced to legally. At that time the tenant owed several months rent.



In meeting with the property owner, and dealing with the continual disturbances, he proved to be of no help and was most likely afraid to go to the building personally, since the problem tenant threatened him as well. It became obvious that the landlord had lost total control of the building and could not be counted on to assist in our efforts. At this time the incidents were escalating and for the landlord to legally get rid of the main problem tenant through the eviction process would require several months.

A Final Response: Closing the Building

After assessing all other options and fearing a serious incident, I determined that the building had to be red tagged by neighborhood service and vacated. I informed the landlord I would be asking the city to revoke his certificate of occupancy and close his building. In October 1998 I served the landlord with a nuisance abatement letter, which ordered him to a hearing in front of city officials to answer to the problems which still continued at his building and were getting progressively worse.

In November 1998 the City responded by holding another hearing. This time, the landlord appeared with his attorney because he did not want the building to be closed. The landlord and his attorney argued the fact that he has always complied with the City's requests. I explained that he has failed to take responsibility for his property, and the problems have increased over time. I also stated that the landlord had no control over the building, which was evident from his own fear to go to the building and all the incidents of which he had no knowledge.

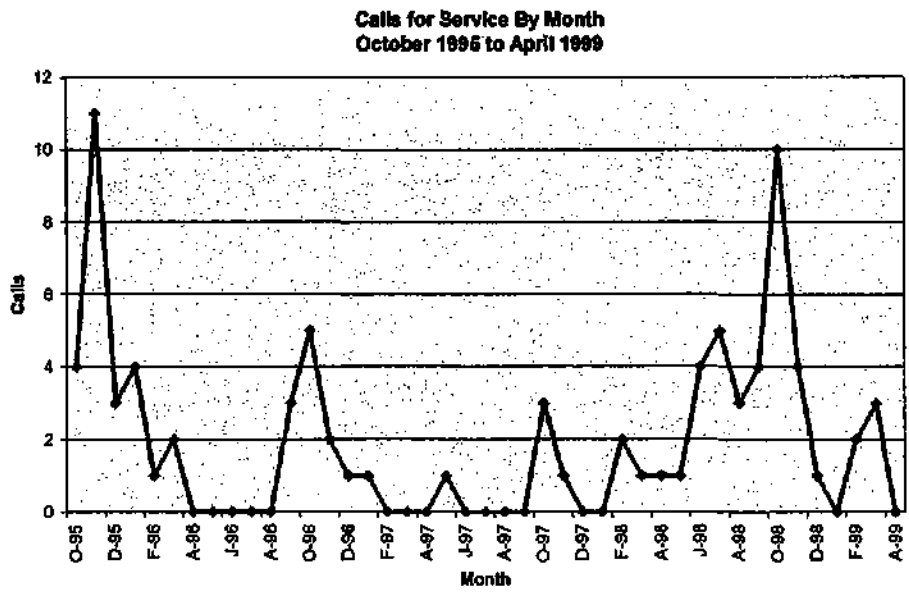
Several pieces of evidence were presented during the hearing, including police reports illustrating the extent of police involvement, detailed lists of calls for service, and photos of the condition of the building. This information was very important in describing how the property had progressively deteriorated over time; however, the most influential evidence presented that day was the testimony from neighbors.

Once the hearing was scheduled, I canvassed the immediate community and contacted as many neighbors as possible. I explained the process, and asked them to attend the hearing. Several were able to take time off work, or juggle their schedules to

not only attend the hearing, but to provide detailed, descriptive testimony on how much the property in question disrupted their home lives. They explained how the constant traffic, noise disruptions, and fear of retaliation had kept them virtual prisoners in their homes. They also spoke of how the residents of the property in question seriously reduced their ability to enjoy their own properties.

As a result of the testimony and other evidence, the Deputy City Manager revoked the landlord's certificate of occupancy for six months. This was the longest time period any building had been ordered closed since the City started the abatement process. The time period came as a surprise to all but it was clear would be necessary to get the message to this landlord and others that the City will not put up with the problems arising from rental property and absentee landlords who do not accept responsibility for their property.

Some tenants had to be removed from the building on the eviction day. The main problem tenant destroyed the apartment upon leaving. It was then that I believe the



landlord finally realized the type of tenants he had and the problems the City and neighbors had to deal with. Due to enforcement efforts the main

problem tenant relocated out of the city and about 30 miles away. He has not been seen in the City since then. All other tenants have not been a problem at their new apartments so they appear to have learned from this incident as well.

Since the closing of the building, Neighborhood Services and I have conducted periodic checks and inspections. As of April 1999, the landlord has yet to do any repairs and has been issued two city compliance tickets for failing to clean up accumulated rubbish. These tickets have a seventy-five dollar fine attached to each of them.

I have been trying to educate the landlord since the closing of his building on how to select tenants and do background checks. I have also directed him to the County's Senior Services agency to get a contract to provide housing to the elderly. I believe he would not have as many problems managing them. The landlord has been constantly reminded that he will not get his rental certificate back until the building is up to code and the City is going to be very meticulous when he reapplies. The landlord has spoke of possibly selling the building but has not yet decided. I have spoke with several other landlords from the area that would be interested in purchasing the building and renovating it if he decides to sell.

This project demonstrates the dedication of many Police Officers, City officials and citizens to improving Joliet's neighborhoods and what can be accomplished through cooperation. Although this project has been open for three years and the building was closed for six months, I have not closed this file. I believe this is not yet a solved problem and will continue to scan, analyze, assess and respond until the problem is completely solved.

When I started this project I was new to our Neighborhood-Policing Unit and although I teach problem solving for the Illinois army national guard I had to learn how to apply the resources available to me as a Police Officer. Since then I have gained much knowledge from supervisors in my unit and several community oriented policing training sessions, hi the last year our entire department has been trained on community policing and all officers have become an asset and resource for the Neighborhood-Policing Unit.

Although I coordinated most efforts for this project it could not have been this successful without the following people and departments involved.

& The Neighborhood Oriented Policing Team and Supervisor

"& Various Patrol Officers and Supervisors

if The Police Tactical Unit

•& The Police Evidence Section

& The Special Projects Unit

The City Legal Department

"& The City Managers Office

^T Neighborhood Services

^ And Most of All the Citizens of Oneida Street

Project contact person:

John Hanke

Police Officer, Neighborhood Oriented Policing Team

Joliet Police Department

150 West Washington Street

Joliet, Illinois 60432-4139

Office: (815) 724-3194

Fax: (815) 724-3289

Email: jdehl@aol.com