

“Operation: Dinner and a Movie”

**Port Saint Lucie Police Department
121 SW Port St. Lucie Blvd.
Port St. Lucie, FL 34984**

Summary:

In early 2000, the newly constructed Rave Motion Pictures Movie Theatre opened in the St. Lucie West area of the City of Port St. Lucie. Several restaurants, Friendly's Ice Cream Shoppe and McAlister's Deli, were also opened nearby during the same time frame. St. Lucie West is one of the City's more affluent communities that also hosts the New York Mets spring training facility. The area has a mix of retirees and working professionals and is comprised of all gated communities.

It didn't take long for the theatre and restaurants to become very popular among the local youth. They began to flock to the area in hundreds on Friday nights. This was a new situation for St. Lucie West residents and the juveniles began generating many complaints to the police. The complaints began as juveniles just "hanging out" and causing minor disturbances with other patrons. These situations were relatively minor and dealt with by the district road patrol officers. However, as the crowd of juveniles began to grow, so did the complaints. More disturbing was that the complaints became much more serious in nature. They went from minor disturbances to fighting, gang fighting, vandalism, vehicle burglaries, reckless driving, and theft of food/services. In certain extreme cases, movie theatre personnel became victims of intimidation, assault, and battery when they tried to intervene.

By September of 2002, the Port St. Lucie Police Department had responded to a total of 335 police calls in the area. This placed a tremendous demand on police resources and was having a negative impact on the businesses. Many local residents had begun avoiding the theatre and restaurants on Friday nights because they felt endangered by the unruly juveniles.

Therefore, on October 1st, 2002, a problem-solving initiative was started to address these problems. The response included the following tactics:

- Educate the parents and community through press releases and handing out a Department approved informational flyer to patrons.
- Heavy police presence at the theatre/restaurants and "zero tolerance" approach to disruptive and criminal behavior.
- The theatre and restaurants authorized the police to act as agents of the property by completing an "Owner's Authorization of Entry" form. This form authorized the officers to issue trespass warnings to unwanted visitors that were causing problems.
- Officers were also encouraged to use the newly instituted Juvenile Notice to Appear and have the problem juveniles appear in "Teen Court."
- \$7,160.00 was allocated from Forfeiture Funds to be used for cinema advertising at the movie theatre. The advertising included crime prevention tips & information for movie patrons.
- The telephone message on the theatre's information line included the new procedures to be followed.
- The procedure for purchasing tickets at the movie theatre was improved.

The POP initiative was concluded in December of 2002. The initiative proved successful by reducing the calls to the area by more than 50%. The juvenile problems were eliminated without having a negative impact on business. This POP initiative was hailed a success by the business owners, community, and police department. The officers involved received recognition for their problem-solving efforts.

Description:**A. SCANNING:**

The problem identified was that numerous juveniles were congregating outside the movie theatre before and after their movie had **started/ended**. The large groups of unsupervised juveniles (sometimes numbering in excess of 200) began causing problems at the movie theatre and surrounding restaurants. The problems consisted of the following:

- Causing disturbances among other patrons at both the theatre and restaurants;
- Fighting;
- Loitering;
- Littering;
- Burglarizing vehicles in the parking lot (locked and unlocked);
- Dining at the restaurants and running out without paying; and
- Reckless Driving

In certain extreme cases, when movie theatre personnel would try to intervene, they became victims of intimidation, assault, battery, and vandalism by the unruly juveniles.

The problem was identified by the officers patrolling the area who were also tasked with repeatedly responding to the complaints. The complaints came from other patrons, movie theatre personnel, restaurant personnel, and citizens who frequented the area.

B. ANALYSIS:

The extent of the problem was validated by researching the addresses through the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. This CAD inquiry revealed that there had been a total of 335 police calls to the location since the theatre and restaurants opened in early 2000. The inquiry also revealed that the problems were most prevalent on Friday nights. This had become unofficially known as "Teen Night" at the theatre.

In the beginning, the calls were relatively minor and didn't place a large demand on police resources or place the community at danger. However as time passed, the calls began to multiply and the seriousness escalated. The calls escalated from basically just juveniles "hanging out" to more serious offenses. Therefore, a POP Action Plan was initiated by the district officers on October 1st, 2002. The Action Plan effort was coordinated by the District III Neighborhood Beat Coordinator, Officer Kacey Donnell, and supervised by the Community-Oriented Policing Supervisor, Sergeant Carmine Izzo. All District III officers were educated about the Action Plan and agreed to help solve the problem.

Officers met with movie theatre and restaurant managers and discussed the problems. Through joint observations and interviews with the juveniles, it was learned that the juveniles were being dropped off early in the evening by their parents and not being picked up until late at night. The observations also revealed that the juveniles would not immediately purchase a movie ticket. They would go directly to the game room and concession areas and spend all of their money. After spending their money on candy, sodas, and arcade games, they would not have enough money left to purchase a movie ticket.

This resulted in the juveniles having hours of idle time to spend in the area of the theatre and restaurants. As the number of juveniles in the same predicament increased, so did the seriousness and number of complaints. With no money and a lot of time, they began occupying their time in ways that disturbed and/or victimized others. Some of the juveniles began walking through the parking lots in search of unlocked vehicles. When one was found, they would burglarize the unlocked vehicle and take change from the ashtray/console and steal compact discs, or anything they could easily conceal. When no unlocked vehicles could be found or the burglary spoils was insufficient, they began breaking windows and forcing entry into the vehicles, especially those with visible valuables. Other juveniles took the opportunity to go around the rear of the theatre or into a nearby wooded area and engage in lewd acts.

Observation and call analysis also revealed that the juveniles would walk along an unlighted roadway (approx. .25 mile) to the surrounding restaurants. The juveniles would walk in the middle of the roadway and refuse to move when cars approached. This generated many complaints from citizens and placed the juveniles at risk of being seriously injured by being struck by a motor vehicle.

The analysis stage revealed the following problems:

- Unsupervised juveniles being left at the theatre and restaurant area for long periods of time;
- This idle time led to vehicle burglary, fights, loitering, lewd activity, walking in the streets, and possible drug & alcohol use in the parking lot.

Based upon these primarily identified problems, a response plan was created.

C. RESPONSE:

The first stage of the response was to educate the parents and inform the community of the planned police response. A press release was prepared and provided to the local media. The press release informed the community of the problems being experienced at the theatre/restaurants and that the police would be present to ensure a safe environment for all patrons.

On Friday, October 4th, 2002, there was heavy police presence at the theatre/restaurants. Officers handed out a Department approved informational flyer to all patrons as they arrived at the theatre. Officers made it a point to meet with the parents who were dropping off juveniles. The officers took extra time and explained the flyer and anticipated police response to the parents. (A copy of the flyer is attached to this packet as Attachment #1). The local media (television & newspapers) were present and featured the problem-solving efforts during the nightly newscasts and weekend newspapers. The response from the community was overwhelmingly positive. Citizens interviewed were thankful that the police were doing something to eliminate the unruly juveniles.

The theatre and restaurants authorized the police to act as agents of the property by completing an "Owner's Authorization of Entry" form. This form authorized the officers to issue trespass warnings to unwanted visitors that were causing problems. Officers were also encouraged to use the newly instituted Juvenile Notice to Appear and have the problem juveniles appear in "Teen Court." This would allow the juvenile's behavior to be judged and punished by his or her own peers. Thus eliminating the stigma that the police were unfairly punishing and/or targeting juveniles.

A request was approved by the Chief of Police and City Council to use \$7,160.00 from Forfeiture Funds to be used for cinema advertising at the movie theatre. A still picture message of the "Lock It or Lose It" campaign was produced and is shown prior to the beginning of each movie. "Lock It or Lose It" is primarily used to combat unlocked vehicle burglaries.

A new telephone message was produced for the theatre's information line. The recorded message now includes a reminder to please drop off children no earlier than 20 minutes prior to the movie start time and to pick them up no later than 20 minutes after the movie has ended.

The procedure for purchasing tickets at the movie theatre was improved. Movie tickets must be shown prior to entering the theatre complex, which includes the game room and concession area. This forces the juveniles to purchase tickets prior to entering the theatre building. By making sure a movie ticket is purchased, this helps ensure the juvenile will be inside the theatre watching a movie and not wandering the local area committing criminal acts.

D. ASSESSMENT:

Due to the collective problem-solving efforts of everyone involved in this POP Action Plan, juvenile congregation at the theatre and surrounding restaurants was reduced to safe and manageable levels. The number of calls at this location and the nature of their severity have been enormously reduced. It was made clear to the violators that unruly and/or criminal behavior was not going to be tolerated at the theatre and surrounding restaurants.

Since the implementation of this POP Action Plan, the police service calls to this location have been reduced by more than 50%. More importantly, is that many of the calls received after the POP Action Plan, are not criminal in nature. They include calls such as vehicle lock-outs, medical assistance, fire alarms, etc. The complaints about disruptive juveniles have been nearly eliminated.

Furthermore, none of the businesses have suffered any reduction in business or movie ticket sales. Response from most parents and other patrons has been overwhelmingly positive. Managers of all the concerned businesses have remarked that there is now a positive atmosphere for patrons and the community.

The results were measured through interviews with patrons and business managers & employees. They all agreed that the environment was much more enjoyable following the POP Action Plan.

A check of the CAD system revealed that there were only five calls received in the two months following the POP Action Plan. It should be noted, none of the five calls were criminal in nature.

District Officers report that no longer do they receive complaints about the juveniles walking in the street or disturbing other citizens. However, they continue to monitor the area and make their presence known. This has proven successful in keeping any of the problems from reoccurring.

This POP Action Plan was successful in accomplishing the desired goals.

Reference List:

No academic sources were consulted during the course of this project.

Agency and Officer Information:

- The problem-solving initiative was primarily adopted by the officers that serve in the district of where the problem was occurring.
- The first-line supervisors encouraged their officers to get involved in the problem-solving project and afforded them the time to focus on the effort.
- All members of our Police Department receive training in problem-oriented policing and are encouraged to use their creativeness when addressing repeat problems. The project is documented on our Department Problem-Solving Action Plan form and employs the SARA problem-solving concept.
- During this problem-solving project, the Department incurred some minor overtime expenses. With the assistance of on-duty officers and supervisors, the overtime costs were minimized. Overtime was held below 40 hours for the entire project.
- The informational flyer that was circulated to the parents in the early stages of the project was approved by the Chief of Police prior to being distributed.
- The movie theatre advertising expense of \$7,160.00 was covered through forfeiture funds.

If you have any questions or require any further information, please contact our Department's **Community-Oriented Policing Supervisor**, Sgt. Carmine Izzo, at one of the following numbers: office: (772) 871-5001; cellular: (772) 201-0945; fax: (772) 344-4106; or E-mail: CIzzo@cityofpsl.com.



John M. Skinner
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NOTICE

Due to the increase in traffic complaints, vandalism, criminal mischief, and most of all, FIGHTING, the Port St. Lucie Police Department will implement the following procedures at the Rave Motion Pictures Movie Theatre on Friday nights. We are hoping that all parents, guardians, and other adults will assist in these procedures to reduce the above problems. Therefore, we ask that all visitors adhere to the following rules:

Parents are requested to drop off their child within a reasonable time before the desired movie starts (10-20 minutes) and pick up their child promptly after the completion of the movie. Any child left in the game room or waiting area after the start of the next movie will be directed to call their parents to be picked up. The child will need to use the pay phone to do so, unless the child has his or her own cellular phone. Please make sure your child has money for telephone calls.

All children when exiting the vehicle will be directed to immediately purchase a ticket for the next movie showing, and not a later movie showing, unless the desired movie is sold out. Any child waiting for a later movie will be directed to call parents to be picked up and returned later for their desired movie showing. There will be no waiting or hanging around outside the theatre area for any reason - No Exceptions.

After the purchase of a movie ticket, children will be instructed to wait inside the game room and/or waiting area until the start of their desired movie. There will be no waiting for friends in front of or around the exterior of the movie theatre.

The Rave Motion Pictures Movie Theatre is a wonderful and welcomed addition to St. Lucie West. All attendees are expected to adhere to all rules while attending a movie. Anyone causing any type of disruption will be removed from the theatre and denied a refund or re-entry.

If your child and/or friends wish to visit the Friendly's Ice Cream Shoppe or McAlister's Deli before or after the movie, please make transportation arrangements. There are no sidewalks from the theatre to the restaurants and there have been numerous traffic complaints and near accidents because of the numerous children walking in the street. There will also be no "hanging out" in the parking lots of the Rave, Friendly's, or McAlister's.

Thank you for your cooperation in helping us ensure your child's safety.



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