

May 17, 2004

To the Herman Goldstein Award Selection Committee:

I am very pleased to nominate the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's Highland Creek Garage Robbery Project for the 2004 Herman Goldstein Award.

This project exemplifies the application of the SARA model to a neighborhood problem. The two officers involved in the project had the privilege of working with Herman Goldstein and Ron Clarke on a prior project involving appliance thefts. On that project they had the opportunity to see the value of a through analysis of the problem and then tailoring a response based on the results of that analysis. This project is a confirmation that the officers are able to apply what they have learned to other problems. Their ability to fully understand and implement the SARA model has made them two of the leading problem solvers in the department.

I am very proud of this project, both for its analytical techniques and the resulting decrease in burglaries that it produced for the Highland Creek community.. I appreciate your consideration of this project for the Herman Goldstein Award.

Sincerely,

Darrel W. Stephens
Chief of Police

Highland Creek Garage Robberies Executive Summary

Scanning:

- Increase in burglaries in one of the response areas in CMPD's North Division
- Officers assumed recurrence of appliance thefts from construction sites
- Initial scan of reports showed that problem was garage burglaries

Analysis:

- GIS mapping showed concentration of garage burglaries in Highland Creek
- Garage burglaries had doubled between 2001-2002
- Risk factor for Highland Creek had increased from 3 per 1,000 homes in 2002 to 5.9 per 1,000 homes in 2003.
- Common factors in burglaries were open garage doors, theft of golf clubs, and no force entry into garages

Response:

- Education campaign through Highland Creek Board of Governors, neighborhood cable channel and newsletter
- Garage robberies peaked with 8 in August 2003
- Education campaign had pointed out the problem but not how to solve it
- Compliance check on closed garage doors was 93.5% in August 2003
- New education campaign , with problem solving emphasis implemented in September 2003, Geo Notify used as communication method

- Compliance checks repeated in September and October 2003 with compliance rates of 95.4% and 97.1% respectively
- Decrease in police presence to see if that was a factor in decline in garage burglaries; slight increase in November and December 2003.

Assessment:

- No garage burglaries in three of first four months of 2004; 2 in March 2004
- Compliance check repeated; slight decline in rate to 95.4%
- Geo Notify message repeated
- Survey conducted to assess how residents received information and identify concerns.
- No displacement to burglaries of residences; some displacement to other parts of response area.

Highland Creek Garage Burglaries

Scanning

Early in 2003, there was a perception in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's North Division that burglaries were increasing in one of the response areas. There is a lot of residential construction in this response area and it was believed that appliance burglaries to houses under construction were the cause of the increase. Officers Eric Rost and Dan Cunius were tasked to investigate the burglary increase. In previous years, the two officers had done a considerable amount of work on thefts from construction sites and had found that the major problem had been the installation of appliances while homes had still been under construction. Cunius and Rost had worked with contractors who were active in their response area and had commitments from some builders to delay installation of appliances till just prior to closings. This had helped to bring about a reduction in appliance thefts in the response area.

The first step the officers did was to examine the burglary reports in the response area for the past two years. Their initial analysis showed that the appliance thefts had leveled off but they now had a new crime trend they had not anticipated-burglaries from attached garages.

Analysis

Rost and Cunius began an in-depth analysis of residential burglary reports for the two previous years. They divided the reports into categories: burglaries to homes, burglaries

to apartments and burglaries to garages. The initial review of the burglary reports resulted in the surprising discovery that, for the two previous years, garage break-ins had accounted for a fourth of the total burglaries in the response area.

Year	Number of Burglaries	Garage Burglaries
2001	145	37 (26%)
2002	163	41 (25%)

The officers felt they needed to better analyze the problem in their response area and next went to the department's Research, Planning, and Analysis Bureau to obtain GIS maps of the garage burglaries. An examination of the maps did not show any significant patterns for 2001. However the 2002 map showed a clear concentration of garage burglaries in the Highland Creek community.

Highland Creek is a golf course community in the northeast part of the North Division's Response Area 1. Highland Creek straddles both Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties and there are four entrances into the community. Highland Creek has a rather unique structure in that it is composed of 33 separate neighborhoods, each with its own identity, that function under the umbrella of one consolidated community association. The neighborhood is quite diverse both in terms of its population mix and the types of housing within the 33 neighborhoods.

Upon seeing the burglary pattern on the map, Rost and Cunius went back to the individual burglary reports to conduct a more in-depth analysis of what was happening in

Highland Creek. The initial analysis showed that garage burglaries in Highland Creek had doubled from 8 in 2001 to 16 in 2002. During 2002, the garage burglaries in Highland Creek accounted for 39% of all the garage burglaries in the entire response area.

Garage Burglaries

Year	Response Area	Highland Creek
2001	37	8 (21%)
2002	41	16 (39%)

The officers next calculated the risk rate for homes in Highland Creek and the remainder of the response area so that they would be able to tell if the response they ultimately designed had any impact on the problem and to monitor for displacement. They determined that approximately 2700 of the homes in Highland Creek are in Mecklenburg County. They divided the number of burglaries by the number of homes and multiplied by 1000. They found that the risk factor for garage burglaries had increased from 3 per 1,000 homes in 2001 to 5.9 per 1,000 homes in 2002. The same formula was adopted for the remainder of the response area (RA) using 8261 homes.

Highland Creek Garage Burglary Risk Rate

Year	Risk Rate
2001	3 per 1,000 homes vs. RA 3.5 per 1,000
2002	5.9 per 1,000 homes vs. RA 3 per 1,000

Cunius and Rost studied each of the garage burglary reports individually to see what they could discover about the characteristics of these burglaries. They found that golf clubs

were taken in 67% of the burglaries and that the average loss in the burglaries had increased from \$1, 478 in 2001 to \$1, 512 in 2002. They also found that the common factor in the burglaries was that the garage doors were open in 88% of the incidents in Highland Creek. In all cases, no force was used to gain entry into the garage. In some cases, the suspect used a garage door opener left in the victim's vehicle in the driveway. In another case, the suspect gained entry to the garage through an unlocked side door. A majority of the burglaries were reported to have taken place between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

The officers also found that only three of the 24 cases in the previous two years had been cleared by arrest. In two of the cases, the officers had made on-scene arrests after homeowners had caught the offenders. One other case had been cleared by investigation. The suspects in two of the cases lived in the Highland Creek community.

Response

Once the officers understood the nature of the garage burglaries in Highland Creek, they decided that the most effective response would be a public education campaign through the outlets available to them in the Highland Creek community. As stated earlier, Highland Creek is comprised of 33 separate neighborhoods that operate under one community association, the Highland Creek Board of Governors. Unlike traditional neighborhood associations where all homeowners can potentially attend a meeting, the Highland Creek Board of Governors' meetings are attended by one representative from each of the neighborhoods. In May of 2003, Officers Cunius and Rost met with the

Board of Governors and made them aware of the high incidence of garage burglaries.

The representatives attending this meeting were surprised at the magnitude of the problem; apparently the size of the neighborhood was an impediment to an exchange of information. The Board of Governors took it upon themselves to disseminate this information through the use of the community's local cable channel and community newsletter. One of the residents contacted one of the local television stations that interviewed the officers about the garage burglaries.

Once the officers had conducted their education campaign, they anticipated that the garage burglaries would decline. To their dismay, they found that was not the case.

Within the next three months, there were an additional eight burglaries, peaking with 5 burglaries in August of 2003. This was the highest number of garage burglaries in any single month in Highland Creek.

The officers reevaluated their response to see if they could determine why the education campaign had no impact on the problem. In doing so, they realized that their message had centered on making the community aware of the problem but had not really dealt with how to solve the problem. The officers recognized they had failed to communicate the importance of closing the garage doors to reduce the opportunity for thieves to strike.

They returned to the principles of the crime triangle to formulate a new response realizing that reducing the opportunity for the crime would be the only way they could reasonably expect to reduce the risk factor which, by then, had risen to almost 9 per 1,000 homes.

Cunius and Rost had learned from their work on the appliance thefts that compliance from the potential victims is a critical component in problem solving. In this particular case, compliance would be indicated by homeowners closing their garage doors and reducing the opportunity for thieves to strike. They decided to calculate a community compliance rate by actually doing a physical count of the garage doors left open and unattended in Highland Creek. In August 2003, Officers Rost and Cunius enlisted the help of Officer Dave Johnson to do compliance checks in Highland Creek. They did four rounds of manually counting open garage doors to determine the compliance rate which is calculated as the number of closed garage doors divided by the total number of homes, then multiplied by 100. Two of the compliance checks were done during the day; the other two at night. The compliance rate in August was 93.5% with an average of 175 garage doors left open.

As the officers were doing their compliance checks, they noticed a lot of items stored in garages that would normally be kept in storage buildings. The officers later learned that the neighborhood association covenants in Highland Creek did not permit the installation of storage buildings upon the properties of the residents, forcing them to use their garages as their primary storage area. Another area of concern that officers noticed during compliance checks was the interior garage door that leads into the house. Most of these doors do not have deadbolt locks on them because the homebuilders do not treat them like exterior doors. The first line of defense is the closed garage door. In some instances, officers noticed the interior garage door standing open which leads to other crime/safety concerns.

The officers decided to revise their public education campaign since it was clear to them that word about the problem had not been disseminated through the community and residents had not figured out on their own that closing the garage door was their greatest crime prevention tool. Cunius and Rost decided to take advantage of some of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's most recent technology innovations by using the Geo Notify Emergency Communication System to contact Highland Creek residents. The Geo Notify Emergency Communication System allows the department to select an area such as a street or a neighborhood that needs to receive some critical information, record a message, and then have that message sent to each house in the selected area by telephone.

Cunius and Rost contacted Officer Craig Allen in the Crime Prevention Bureau. They asked Officer Allen to record a message in which he explained the rising problem of garage burglaries and larceny from autos. Officer Allen gave out crime prevention tips on how to prevent these crimes (lock car doors, shut garage doors, etc.) as well as personal protection tips.

The message was sent by telephone to homes in the Highland Creek community in September 2003. After the broadcast, officers did another five rounds of personally counting the open garage doors in Highland Creek. They found an average of 124 garage doors open, meaning that the compliance rate had risen to 95.4%. They repeated the exercise in October and, in four rounds of checks, found only an average of 78 garage

doors open, equating to a compliance rate of 97.1%. In three months, the compliance rate had increased by 3.6%.

Community Compliance

Month	Compliance Rate	Average of Open Doors
August '03	93.5%	175
September '03	95.4%	124
October' 03	97.1%	78

After the broadcast of the message, garage burglaries declined from the 5 in August to none during a six-week period encompassing the month of September and part of October. There were two garage burglaries later in October.

Cunius and Rost wondered if the police presence during the compliance checks had been the primary reason that the garage burglaries had declined. They decreased their presence in the neighborhood during November and December. There were two garage burglaries in November and one in December of 2003.

Assessment:

In the first four months of 2004, garage burglaries continued to decline in Highland Creek and police presence remained at a normal level. With 2 garage burglaries occurring in March 2004, officers wondered if the compliance rate had slipped.

Compliance checks were completed and it was determined the compliance rate had decreased from a high of 97.1% to 95.4%. Another Geo Notify Emergency Communication System message was completed to alert the residents of the burglaries and to remind them to remain diligent in their crime prevention efforts.

Highland Creek Garage Burglaries-2004

January	0
February	0
March	2
April	0

Officers Cunius and Rost calculated the risk rates for September 2003-April 2004. The risk rate has declined from 8.3 in September 2002-April 2003 to 3.9 in the comparable period in 2003-2004.

The officers also thought it was important to try and understand how most people in the neighborhood received the information about the garage burglaries as there would be lessons learned for any subsequent problems. Cunius and Rost developed a short survey to get feedback from the residents. Along with Officer Dave Johnson, they administered the survey in person to 5% of the 2700 homeowners in Highland Creek. As they had suspected, sharing the information initially at the Highland Creek Board of Governors meeting had turned out to be relatively ineffective since only one representative of each of the 33 neighborhoods attended and those representatives did not appear to have shared

the information effectively. Only two of the survey respondents reported having received the information as the result of the community meeting. On the other end of the scale, 38 of the 137 respondents reported hearing about the garage burglary problem through the community newsletter and 34 had received the information through the Geo Notify Emergency Communication System generated phone message. Those homeowners who had received the information through Geo Notify Emergency Communication System were quite complimentary of the system, confirming the officers' feeling that it could become one of the most valuable public information and crime prevention tools available to them. Another 16 respondents reported hearing about the problem in conversation with neighbors; it may be that some of those neighbors also received their information from the Geo Notify Emergency Communication System. 17 of the homeowners surveyed became aware of the problem through publicity on the neighborhood's cable channel. Both Rost and Cunius believe that the cable channel, newsletter and Geo Notify Emergency Communication System will be valuable communication channels for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department to use in contacting Highland Creek residents for future problem solving efforts.

Despite the burglaries, all of the respondents, even those who had been victims, continue to feel safe in their neighborhood. In ranking community concerns, nearly half of the respondents had no concerns or worries to express about their community. For residents who expressed a concern, speeding was mentioned more often than any crime-related issue.

A similar project was attempted by another of the department's patrol divisions in the Plaza-Midwood neighborhood. The officers involved with this project could not obtain cooperation from the citizens to shut their garage doors. The residents feared that the suspects would break into the living quarters of the house, causing damage to their house and loss of more valuable property. The residents were content with the limited loss of property from their garages.

Highland Creek did not experience an increase of burglaries into the living quarters. The overall burglaries during the September-April time period reduced in the neighborhood from 22 burglaries (2002-2003) to 9 burglaries (2003-2004). Seven of the nine burglaries in 2003-2004 were garage burglaries; in 2002-2003, 15 of the 22 burglaries had been garage burglaries, thus the officers felt this dispelled the myth that securing the garage door would result in increased burglaries into living quarters. With the increased compliance rates in Highland Creek, there appears to have been some displacement of garage burglaries to the remainder of the response area. The risk rate for the remainder of the response area during the months of September to April (2002-2003) was 2.5 homes per 1000. Since the implementation of their response in the Highland Creek Community the risk rate for the remainder of the response area increased to 3.6 homes per 1000. The officers have a true understanding that a safe city is created one neighborhood at a time. With this understanding they will identify the next neighborhoods being affected by this crime and replicate their public information campaign in those neighborhoods.

Officers Cunius and Rost attribute much of the success of this project to the extra time they devoted to analyzing the problem so that they could have a full understanding of what was actually occurring in the Highland Creek community. They are strong advocates for the use of the SARA model and its accompanying analysis and will continue to apply the SARA model in working with the communities they serve.

Agency and Officer Information:

1. This problem solving initiative was adopted by the two officers with the support of their chain of command in the North Division.
2. All officers at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department receive problem solving training both at the recruit and in-service levels. The officers involved in this project, Dan Cunius and Eric Rost, had participated in a project on appliance thefts with Herman Goldstein and Ron Clarke while they were assisting the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department in advancing its problem solving efforts. Due to that opportunity, Cunius and Rost have had more in-depth training in problem solving than most other CMPD officers. They embraced the opportunity to involve other officers in problem solving efforts.
3. Officers receive no additional incentives for problem solving. Problem solving is one of the major categories in their annual performance evaluations.
4. The training provided by Goldstein and Clarke was the primary resource used by the officers in designing and executing this project.
5. No major issues were identified with the problem solving model.

6. The major resource in this project was the time of Officers Cunius, Johnson and Rost.
There were no resources outside of the department's budget.

7. Contact Information

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