



**CRIME REDUCTION at
LOW INCOME HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**
Neenah, Wisconsin

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City of Neenah Police Department
Together We Succeed

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Summary

“Neenah units respond to Primrose Apartments for a disturbance.” Too many times officers from the Neenah Police Department would acknowledge the radio call and head back to the dreaded Primrose Apartment complex for yet another problem. The City of Neenah is a fairly affluent community located just 30 miles south of Green Bay, Wisconsin. The city of 25,000 people is in an area known as the Fox Valley, which has become the fastest growing area of the state. The rapid growth is caused by the quality of life enjoyed by its citizens, strong families, good schools, and steady employment.

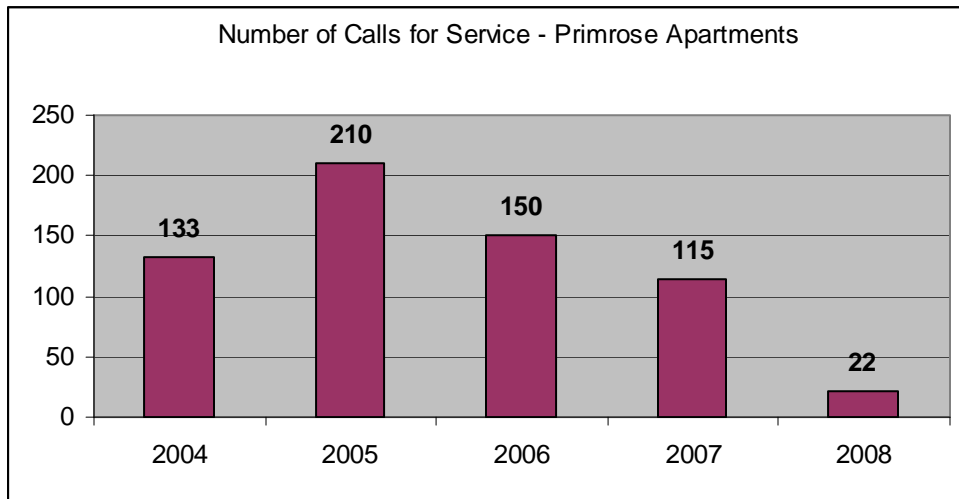
This brings us to the Primrose Apartment complex located on the west side of Neenah. The complex was built a couple decades ago to offer government assisted living apartments to those who needed time to get back on their feet and move into the affordable housing located throughout the area. As the years have passed and the area has become a more attractive place to live, problems associated with any urban area began to fester at the Primrose Apartment complex. Soon drug dealers from Milwaukee, Chicago, and Racine began to move into the apartments as they could turn a bigger profit from their products than in larger cities. Drug dealing, fights, sexual assaults, and intimidation of neighbors became the norm at the complex.

Officer Pam Martin was appointed to the Crime Prevention position in the summer of 2006 and her first priority was reduction of crime at the apartments. Officer Martin met with the complex management along with city entities to begin the process of crime reduction at the complex. She

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worked hard to identify problem apartments and used the newly established abatement program to force evictions on drug dealers and troublemakers.

The results were startling. The following outlines the calls for police services at the complex.



The dramatic drop in numbers clearly represents the outstanding job Officer Martin has done with this problem. The numbers don't even come close to representing the hundreds of family members and neighbors that can now freely move around and enjoy the complex without fear for their safety.

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Objectives of the Project

Since the turn of the century the Primrose Apartment complex continued a steady decent into a haven of resident on resident violence and substance abuse. Calls for service soared from 133 in 2004 to over 210 in 2005. Something needed to be done. Officer Pam Martin initiated this project to work with landlords, city officials, police, clergy, Social Services, and the tenants themselves to stop and turn the wave of crime that had overtaken the complex.

The project aim was to identify problem tenants and drug dealing sources, and to provide support for families that just needed help getting back on their feet as opposed to getting sucked into the quagmire of violence and drugs.

The key objectives are as follows:

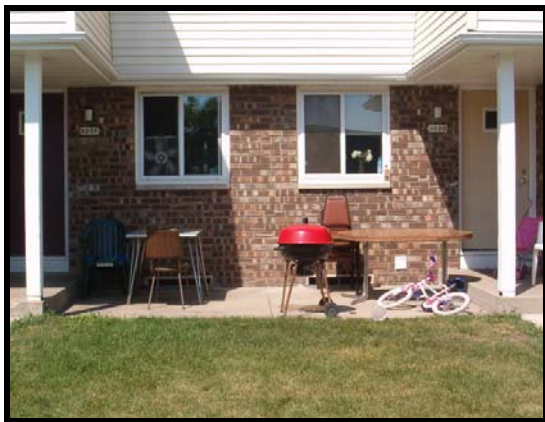
- To effectively enforce state and local laws throughout the complex.
- To target problem people and force them to move out of the complex.
- To create an atmosphere of safety within the complex to allow tenants the comfort to come forward to work with police.
- To promote educational and employment opportunities with the tenants to allow them to move on to a better life.
- To create an atmosphere of pride and belonging within the complex.
- To create and maintain an after action program to maintain and improve the quality of life within the complex.

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Scanning

The Primrose Apartment Complex was poorly managed for years. The infrastructure of the complex was allowed to break down. The apartment grounds were becoming a cluttered area of junked vehicles, old furniture, dilapidated playground equipment, and varied types of garbage.

Management's main concern was filling the apartments at a rate of approximately \$25 per month



in order to be paid a much more substantial amount from Social Services. Due to the cheap cost of living in the complex, and being surrounded by an affluent community, drug dealers quickly moved into the complex with the ability to turn a huge profit without the worry of a turf war.

Violence and loose gang affiliations soon began to surface. Families that had previously moved into the complex with the intent of using it as a stepping stone to get back on their feet found themselves frightened and confused. Good families moved out of the complex and dealers and their customers moved in.

The complex became a compound of fear and intimidation. Residents were afraid and reluctant to call the police and rarely spoke to or cooperated with the officers when they arrived. Crime continued to rise sharply. The incidents of violence and property damage spiked and were way out of whack when compared to other apartment complexes in the City of Neenah.

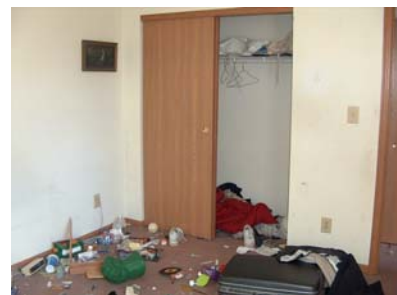
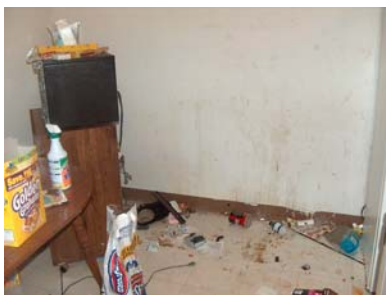
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The problems in the complex then began to spill out into the neighboring blocks, not to mention the school system. It seemed to be like a boulder which had started to slowly roll downhill, but now was picking up speed and wrecking all in its path.

Newly appointed Crime Prevention Officer Pamela Martin quickly recognized that the Primrose Complex must be her first priority and target. She decided to analyze the problem and then use a multi-pronged approach to bring the Primrose Complex under control.



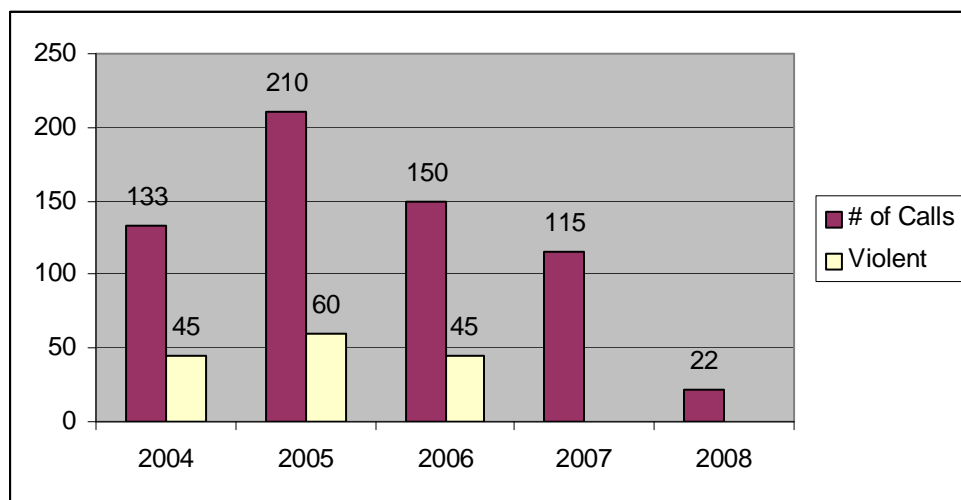
Sample of Primrose Apartment Violations



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Analysis

Officer Martin began to analyze data available to her from when the department went to its new records management system in 2004. A clear trend towards calls for police service and violent crime clearly showed increases from 2004 through 2005 and into 2006.



The graph above illustrates the continued climb in calls for service and violent crime at the complex. The year of 2005 became the clear apex of the problem. Drug dealers had basically taken over the complex and intimidated anyone who was willing to talk to the police. As high as the numbers became they easily could have been doubled due to the unwillingness of residents to come forward and assist the police.

Physical and sexual assaults increased in number and viciousness, families lived in fear and the surrounding neighborhoods began to feel expansion of the drugs and violence into their once shielded lives. Officers increasingly became frustrated at the lack of cooperation from those

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being victimized; therefore, tying the hands of the police on how they could respond. This only emboldened the drug dealers and troublemakers, making them more aggressive and open in their flaunting of the laws. It became clear unless the ring leaders were removed from the equation no law enforcement or social service response would have a long lasting effect.

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Response

In August of 2005 the Neenah Police Department, along with the new management of the Primrose Apartments, decided it was time to send a strong message to both the good and bad residents of the complex. It was decided to hit the drug dealers fast and hard and send the message this was no longer a sanctuary for their dealing. In the early morning hours, 86 SWAT Officers from the Neenah Police Department and surrounding departments hit numerous apartments simultaneously. This led to the immediate arrest of ten drug dealers from Milwaukee and Chicago. The raid had the desired effect. Drug dealers went back underground and residents thanked the police and began to work with the police to take their complex back.

Officer Pamela Martin, who participated in the raids, quickly followed up by making sure that the complex did not slide back into a haven for drugs and violence. She worked closely with the complex management. A series of agreed upon conduct and rules were outlined and enforced to make sure the apartments were used for the intended purpose. No longer would drugs and violence be tolerated. Tenants were told that blacked out windows, graffiti, garbage strewn apartments, and troublemakers were not allowed. Those that refused to follow the rules would be evicted.

Officer Martin also worked closely with the City Attorney to fully put in effect the City's abatement ordinance. This ordinance allows the police department to issue citations to landlords who allow criminal or disorderly conduct to continue in a targeted apartment. This gave the department the ability to target problem apartments and gain compliance from the landlords.

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Officer Martin also worked with Social Services and local religious organizations to help those people that are in need. She has worked extremely well with management to not only target the problem people, but to assist those that are ready and willing to work at getting out of the complex and on their own two feet.

With the help of a local church congregation, Officer Martin planned an outreach to the residents of Primrose Apartments. The collaboration resulted in the birth of the annual Primrose Carnival. The event was a huge success. Officers and parishioners volunteered their time and money. The apartment tenants and their children enjoyed a day full of games, food, fun, and prizes. This event truly allowed both officers and tenants to see each other in a whole new way. It was another building block to the success we are seeing today.



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Assessment

The results of Officer Pamela Martin's multi-pronged approach have been anything short of extraordinary. Officers are no longer frustrated when dealing with the problems at the complex. Unlike past years, the tenants are grateful to see the officers as opposed to being fearful of retribution for speaking to an officer.

The Apartments and the grounds have been cleaned up and renovated, a new playground and activity center has been added, creating a sense of community among the tenants.



Officer Martin and the Primrose Apartment Manager have clearly laid out the rules to live in the complex and have been decisive in enforcement. In a little over two years there have been 96 move-outs from the 72-unit complex. The message has been clearly sent that Primrose Apartments is a place for families and people willing to treat each other with respect and courtesy.

Calls for service have dropped dramatically from the peak problem year of 2005. So far in 2008, there have been only 22 calls for service at the apartment complex, a far cry from the 210 in 2005. Officer Pamela Martin has made sure that the strong message sent from the drug raids continues to be received by any current or prospective resident.

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Officer Pamela Martin has shown great tenacity and skill when it came to dealing with the drug dealers and lawbreakers in the complex. She has also shown great compassion and interest in those that truly are only trying to make a better life for themselves. This past Christmas, Officer Pam Martin organized a gift-giving day at the apartments. Many families are poor and many kids do not get gifts. Officer Pamela Martin was able to raise funds for the complex to buy numerous Christmas presents for the children of the complex. She then arranged a day for all the kids to come in and meet Santa Claus and receive a present. It was a tremendous day for the kids, parents, police, apartment management, and Santa. One last thing, Officer Martin convinced the Chief of Police to be Santa. That would not have happened 2 years ago.



Neenah Police Chief Ray Appel is Santa at the 2007 Primrose Christmas party.



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Agency and Officer Information

Community programming is at the heart of the success of the Neenah Police Department. Employees are expected to develop a relationship with our citizens through a variety of opportunities beyond patrol and investigations. We enjoy the support we receive from local businesses, service and social organizations, and our elected officials. Our officers are special in the eyes of our community leaders and citizens.

Our focus in these programs is to be pro-active in crime reduction and education, and to be facilitators to resolve a host of issues not normally associated with law enforcement. Our team-oriented approach extends beyond the walls of our building to identify a host of resources. Our problem solving efforts require vision to tackle long term solutions, not just treating symptoms. We also pride ourselves on our intense training program and all officers receive training in problem solving, and use of the SARA model.

Officer Martin has set a standard of excellence and continued participation in the project is an everyday expectation for all officers.

The resources for this project consisted of personnel time, which did not exceed the department approved budget.

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Safety grows for Neenah tenants



NATALIE GILBERT (center) plays a card game with some of her children (from left) Caitlin Wheeler, 17; Chelsea Gilbert, 5; and Isabella Wheeler, 15, Saturday at their residence at Primrose Apartments in Neenah.

Post-Crescent photos by M.P. King

Evictions, arrests change lifestyle at Primrose Apartments

By Duke Behnke
Post-Crescent staff writer

NEENAH — Two years ago, Neenah police had an unwritten rule that no officer should respond to Primrose Apartments without backup.



Appel

Officers feared for their safety because the 72-unit, government-subsidized housing project on the city's southwest side had become a haven for drug activity, weapons and fights.

"You never went there alone," Police Chief Ray Appel re-

called. "That speaks to how dangerous an area it was."

Today, Neenah police are free to enter the property alone, Officer Pam Martin, Neenah's crime prevention coordinator, said she recently brought a family member onto the property for a visit.

"I would have never done that before," said Martin, who landed in the hospital in 2005 after a fight with a drug suspect at the property. "I personally would feel comfortable living there."

Police have been so pleased with the turnaround at Primrose Apartments, 1316 Primrose Lane, that they recently sponsored a



CRIME RATES at Primrose Apartments in Neenah have dropped dramatically since 2005.

Christmas party for the tenants, which include 118 children.

Martin and Cheryl Fountaine-Kempf, community manager of Primrose Apartments, purchased gifts for the

children, funded in part by the Neenah Police Benevolence Association. Appel played the role of Santa, handing out the gifts.

That's a far cry from August 2005, when

About the issue

Primrose Apartments, a government-subsidized housing project in Neenah, was a troubled site with drug activity and fights. In September 2005, Dominion Management Services Inc. purchased the building and set about cleaning up the property. Since then, police have been called to the apartments less often.

Neenah police, in cooperation with the Lake Winnebago Area Metropolitan Enforcement Group, executed four simultaneous drug raids at Primrose Apartments and a nearby housing complex on Appleblossom Drive.

See **NEENAH**, A-7

NEENAH: No-tolerance stance created for drug use

From A-1

The raids involved 86 officers and resulted in the arrest of 10 alleged drug dealers from the Milwaukee or Chicago areas. Appel said it was the largest tactical operation ever conducted in northeastern Wisconsin.

"We recognized significant issues at Primrose Apartments," Appel said. "The percentage of calls (for police service) was many times greater than any other neighborhood in the city."

In September 2005, Dominion Management Services Inc. of Plymouth, Minn., acquired Primrose Apartments and set out to clean up the property.

The success was limited until mid-2006, when Dominion hired Fountaine-Kempf, who has 27 years of experience in property management. She has worked closely with Neenah police to stem criminal activity.

"It was a mess," she said of the property. "We had graffiti. We had cardboard and tinfoil in the windows. If they are blackening out their windows, there usually is something going on in those apartments, and you have to address it."

Dominion took a no-tolerance stance toward illegal drug use, tightened the screening process for tenants, installed a security system and fixed up the buildings and grounds.

Fountaine-Kempf evicted tenants who repeatedly violated rules.

"We have had 96 move-outs in a little over two years, and we only have 72 apartments," she said. "We have done a major cleanout."

Police reported a 44 percent drop in calls for service at Primrose Apartments after Dominion took control. The number of disturbances dropped 75 percent, and the number of drug and sexual assault investigations declined

50 percent.

Tenant Nancy Reese, who has lived at Primrose Apartments for 31 years, said she appreciates the changes enacted by Dominion.

"There is a better class of people out here," Reese said. "There were a lot of drugs around here — smoking pot in hallways, beer parties, things like that. People were letting their kids run wild. That's not allowed anymore."

Dick Gill, who has lived across the street from the complex for 25 years, also has noticed a difference.

"The last two years there hasn't been as much crime," he said. "It's been a lot quieter. People are more polite. All in all, it seems like we are getting a better bunch of neighbors."

Fountaine-Kempf said she meets with Neenah police every month to review the calls for service to Primrose Apartments, and she arms herself with that information to oust troublesome tenants.

"If the police department wasn't so apt to work so closely with me, there is no way I could have turned this property around as quickly as I did," she said. "The police department has been phenomenal."

Duke Behnke: 920-729-6622, ext. 32, or dbehnke@postcrescent.com

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A weekly community newspaper of THE POST-CRESCENT

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2008

Safety returns to Neenah's Primrose Apartments

BY DUKE BEINKE
NEWS-RECORD STAFF WRITER

NEENAH — Nancy Reese has seen her share of unsavory things in the 31 years that she has lived at Primrose Apartments.

Illegal drug use. Unsupervised children making a commotion in her building.

Disruptive parties fueled by alcohol.

But all of that has changed with proactive measures by the new owners and the support of the Neenah Police Department.

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2008

THE NEWS-RECORD

SAFETY: Officers notice significant upgrade

From Page 1

And it has paid dividends. Reese said she appreciates the changes enacted by Dominion.

"There is a better class of people out here," Reese said. "There were a lot of drugs around here — smoking pot in hallways, beer parties, things like that. People were letting their kids run wild. That's not allowed anymore."

Neenah police officers also have noticed a major upgrade at Primrose Apartments.

Two years ago, police had an unwritten rule that no officer should respond to the apartments without backup.

Officers feared for their safety because the 72-unit, government-subsidized housing project on the city's southwest side had become a haven for drug activity, weapons and fights.

"You never went there alone," Police Chief Ray Appel recalled. "That speaks to how dangerous an area it was."

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The raids involved 86 officers



Photo courtesy of Cheryl Fountaine-Kempf

MARIXCA VARGAS OPENS a present during a Christmas party at Primrose Apartments in Neenah.

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"If the police department wasn't so apt to work so closely with me, there is no way I could have turned this property around as quickly as I did," she said. "The police department has been phenomenal."

Mayor George Scherck said he is impressed by what has happened at the apartments.

"The turnaround at the Primrose Apartments is an excellent example of what happens when the private sector and the public sector work together," he said. "The police have been very active in that area, and the management has been extraordinary."

"We have an area now where the people are more respectful of property and more respectful of each other. And the end result is that it is a much more positive place to live for everyone."

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