



# PASADENA POLICE DEPARTMENT



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Dear Dr. Guerette:

Please accept our nomination of the Pasadena Police Department's Operation Safe City task force for this year's Herman Goldstein Award. We are proud to be considered for such a prestigious award.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (626) 744-4533.

Sincerely,

CHRISTOPHER O. VICINO  
Acting Chief of Police

COV:tjp

**Pasadena (CA.) Police Department, "Operation Safe City:"**

**Summary:**

The Pasadena Police Department defines Community Policing as a philosophy and organizational strategy that allows the police and the community to work closely together to develop new and innovative ways to solve the problems of crime, social disorder, and neighborhood decay.

This philosophy rests on the belief that everyone in the community deserves the best policing service possible. Our community expects its police department to use the innovative and effective methods to solve neighborhood concerns and problems, beyond those usually employed within the narrow focus of traditional law enforcement. To achieve these standards, open trusting and effective lines of communication between the police, the community and private partners have been developed and are constantly nurtured throughout our community. Within the Pasadena community there are many such partnerships that enhance the quality of life in Pasadena. This nomination focuses on one such undertaking.

Beginning in the fall of 2005, the City of Pasadena began experiencing an increase in gang related violence. This surge in violent crimes included an increase in the number of shootings, assaults, robberies and homicides. In addition to these traditional crimes, a newly discovered trend wherein a dramatic increase in the number of violent street assaults/robberies involving attacks by young African-American male suspects on Hispanic victims was recognized. Street informants told officers that the street term for these incidents was "Sock on Mexicans." The Pasadena Police Department officially labeled these incidents, "Youth Street Attacks."

The actual reasons behind these “Youth Street Attacks” included more than one theory. Some alleged the attacks were racially motivated and actually began in public schools as a bullying tactic. Others claimed that economic factors leading to the displacement of some entire African-American neighborhoods by Hispanics prompted the attacks. What was factually clear was that in Pasadena, traditionally non-confrontational African-American and Hispanic gang members had recently been engaging each other in suspected drug wars. Still others believed that the vulnerability of Hispanic victims, coupled with their reluctance to report the crimes made for opportunistic targets by the suspect. Whatever the reason, a prolific surge in violent street robberies and assaults against lone, mostly undocumented male Hispanics victims was underway.

As these “Youth Street Attacks” continued into 2006 the number of attacks also increased. In response the Pasadena Police Department organized a task force, under the name “Operation Safe City”, out of the Criminal Investigations Division to address this problem.

The task force was made up of officers from patrol, detectives, Safe Schools Team officers and other specialized units to combat these attacks. It was quickly realized that the Youth Street Attacks were connected to the increase in gang related activity and in many cases were spilling over into other crimes of violence including homicides.

We accept that a task force approach to these types of problems is not new. However, the tactics used by the members of this task force, to overcome the fundamental fear of victims to report those crimes was.

## ***The Herman Goldstein Award-Pasadena Police Department***

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Because of the innovative work of the Operation Safe City task force, by the end of 2007, Youth Street Attacks had decreased by nearly 50%; and in 2008 they have been further reduced by 84% since the trend was initially identified in 2006.

The image and trust the Pasadena Police Department has gained in the Hispanic community cannot be measured. As a result of the partnerships forged during this time a previously underserved segment of our community has been empowered. There is no doubt that our partnership will have far reaching implications in the future.

### **Scanning:**

The police department began observing a developing crime problem in the fall of 2005 during a crime net meeting. These meetings are scheduled monthly and are based on the 'CompStat' model attributed to the New York Police Department. At these monthly meetings, command staff members and section commanders hear from detectives, patrol, school resource and other personnel using statistical data and anecdotal information to track crime trends. During the fall of 2005, a significant rise in the number of street assaults involving groups of young African-American male suspects and undocumented Hispanic victims was revealed.

A by-product of the crime net meeting was to brainstorm ideas as to how to stop the emerging trend. In the end it was decided that a task force would be formed and ongoing analysis of the problem would take place on a daily basis.

### **Analysis:**

This analysis confirmed that the assaults were specifically targeting one part of our community. What was clear was the dramatic increase in the number of male Hispanics being assaulted on the streets of Pasadena.

Pasadena Police Department's, Crime Analysis Unit (CAU) discovered that an overwhelming majority of the victims were undocumented, middle-aged (30-60 years old) Hispanics, and alone when they were attacked. CAU also determined these cases had other similar patterns as well:

- Most victims were attacked late at night, usually while walking or riding bicycles home from work
- Every case involved more than 3 teenage African-American suspects.
- In almost every case the victim did not personally contact police regarding the crime. Instead a passerby made the phone call.
- Some witnesses and or victims told officers the suspects made racial remarks before, during or after the attacks.

As the attacks continued into 2006 the police department launched the, "Operation Safe City" effort and the task force was deployed with the sole responsibility of stopping these specific crimes.

One of the most important criterions in the selection of the task force members was that they spoke Spanish and were well-known in the Hispanic community. In fact, one of the task force members was a patrol corporal with previous homicide experience who began working with detectives to determine if these attacks were connected. This corporal, along with other members of the task force began re-contacting the victims, witnesses and informants of these crimes and discovered an additional distinct set of facts.

- The attacks had actually been occurring in Pasadena Schools since the beginning of 2005 but had gone unreported.

- Many of the street attacks were a continuation of Pasadena school campus incidents.
- Some of the attacks were confirmed to be gang initiations forced on younger gang pledges on orders of original, 'OG' African-American gang members. Younger gang members were instructed to attack Hispanics to prove their gang allegiance.
- The incidents were no longer confined to the school campuses. Any Hispanic became a target because they often walked home alone and late at night. Many were also undocumented and were not inclined to call police to report the crime.

In addition, a ten year comparison from 1998-2007 revealed a 15% decrease in part one offense in the City of Pasadena. What was disturbing was that after many years of declining percentages, the city witnesses a 10% increase in Part 1 offenses from 2006 to 2007. A noticeable part of the increase was a 13% increase in the number of assaults and a 25% increase in robberies in 2007. It was determined that these percentage increases were directly connected to the Youth Street Attacks.

**Response:**

Although the department acted quickly to respond to the disturbing trend a major problem was encountered centering on the reluctance of the undocumented victims to speak with police about the attacks. Clearly, the victim's information was critical for a proper evaluation of the problem. Most of the victim's believed that all police departments are connected with immigration officials and feared deportation if they spoke up. To overcome these fears, community meetings were organized through established neighborhood partnerships to spread the word that the Pasadena Police

Department was not involved with immigration issues and was instead trying to help and protect victims of these crimes.

It became evident that traditional community outreach forums would not be enough to bring victims to the table and talk with police about being victimized. An innovative tactic and initial format for the meeting was needed to help overcome the hesitancy on the part of the impacted community members to attend.

To accomplish the objective the initial meeting was organized and advertised as a “job fair.” At the first ‘job fair’ meeting about 30 people who were also undocumented workers attended clearly not expecting any law enforcement presence. Task force members concealed themselves in an adjacent building until the meeting began at which time they entered the room and were able to quickly convince the attendees that they were not about to be deported or prosecuted.

Unexpectedly, at this initial meeting it was discovered that each of the 30 attendees were well aware of the attacks! In fact, many in the room themselves had been victims but they had never reported the incident. From this first meeting, two things were learned:

- There existed a great disconnect between the Police Department and much of the (undocumented) Hispanic community.
- The number of Youth Street Attacks was far higher than originally thought.

A number of similar meetings were organized throughout the city and word spread quickly that the police were trying to help the victims of these previously unreported crimes.

Meetings were held at local churches, at after-school programs and at the local Pasadena Chapter of the NAACP. The community response was positive but this proved especially to be true in the African-American community. Everyone wanted to help stop the surge in violent crime and end the attacks.

As more victims came forward and investigations were conducted, several suspects were arrested. As the cases were filed with the District Attorney it was determined that the DA had difficulty charging suspects with anything more than street robbery or assault charges. Since a number of the attacks appeared to be racially motivated, detectives felt that hate crime charges should also be included however, legal technicalities made filing those charges difficult.

To send a strong message to those inclined to commit such crimes, a special unit of the District Attorney's Office was brought into the operations and began working alongside the detectives handling the cases. This led to increased chances that hate crime charges would be included whenever possible.

Operation Safe City's task force continued to work to end these attacks through 2007 and into 2008. Public service flyers were printed and distributed in English and Spanish that warned of the attacks. These public service announcements were distributed to workers in the downtown business district as task force members met with restaurant owners who employed any of the victims as busboys, dishwashers and cooks to enlist their support. Meetings were held at places of employment during which workers were asked to walk home in groups, or to take the bus rather than walk home alone at night.



The approach of informing the public and business owners was very well received, especially by the employees.

Business owners were also more than willing to participate to help protect their employees. All of this greatly enhanced the good will between the police department, business owners, employees and the community at large.

Innovation is recognized in two distinct areas. First innovation is displayed beginning with the initial selection of task force personnel. Rather than the traditional manner of selecting 'favorites' the department hand-picked officers to effectively develop trust in the impacted community and moved these officers from their assignments. Doing so forced units to run short and to depart from concerns about staffing minimums, statistics, etc. The innovative approach was furthered as the decision to provide financial, and support resources to the task force in the face of other budgeting priorities occurred. These moves are unconventional approaches to traditional policing styles.

Each officer was selected for their competence and was not only respected inside the department but also in the impacted community. All the officers spoke Spanish, were former detectives, including a former homicide detective. This corporal is well-known for his efforts to procure used uniforms and discarded police equipment that was later being donated to Mexican law enforcement. These efforts further cemented the department's ties with the local community.

A second example of innovation is exhibited when the department quickly recognized and responded to problems associated with the victims' fear of law enforcement. An immediate need to gain the trust and cooperation of these victims would be difficult but absent success, the crimes were likely to increase and perhaps

result in the death of a victim(s). We learned that the victims' fears were primarily based on their encounters with law enforcement in Mexico where corruption is rampant.

But perhaps a more pervasive fear was rooted in the fact that many of the victims were in the country illegally.

The department understood that without victims willing to testify in court there could be no prosecution and absent this, the situation would only exacerbate itself. It was essential that trust be developed to convince people to come forward despite their immigration status.

Bringing people to "job fairs" was an innovative yet risky approach, developed to encourage attendance. This tactic proved successful in the early minutes of the first meeting when attendees learned that the intent of the meeting was an offer of help from these committed officers.

The meetings were held at locations already in use by day laborers and community partners and neighborhood leaders were on hand to assist. As these "job fairs" took place, word quickly spread and the trust built through our outreach efforts to local employers and their employees. As additional victims came forward and information was developed, arrests occurred and the solving of these crimes grew. This is evidenced by arrest statistics. Literally within days of the inception of "job fair" meetings, police, courts and a previously underserved part of the community began working together.

The reduction in cases now allows members of the task force to redirect their efforts towards helping the victims of these crimes seek civil remedies. Through

mandated restitution and referrals to existing social programs, efforts are underway to help victims recover lost wages and to pay medical costs associated with the attacks.

This not only helps build bridges with the victims and impacted community but also sends the message to suspects that if they commit these crimes, incarceration will not be the only sanction.

The Pasadena Police Department is fortunate to have a core group of officers who are highly motivated, passionate, and innovative in their approach to solving crime and making the City of Pasadena a better community.

### **Assessment**

The assessment of success in this case falls in line with the long standing cornerstone of Community Policing. Police administrators have long known that community involvement with police departments is both hard to accomplish and even harder to maintain. This is true if the community is not distrustful or disenfranchised and especially true if it is. Most agencies try to achieve involvement through community outreach sections, school programs or perhaps inclusion of civilians into department programs like police volunteer groups or civilian review boards. Pasadena is no different. Rarely does community involvement come from people who would like to remain invisible.

In California, the issue of illegal immigration is at the forefront of politics and a constant topic of discussion. However, the same principals the Pasadena Police Department applied in response to these violent street attacks could be applied anywhere. Other ethnic groups in the United States may have the same reservations to a greater or lesser degree about cooperating with law enforcement than the Hispanic population did in

Pasadena. Once those reservations are addressed and overcome, the results are bound to be successful.

The following table provides statistical data that shows that “Operation Safe City” was extremely effective at stopping the Youth Street Attacks:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total # of Reported Cases</b>	<b>Total # of Arrests</b>
2006	56	43
2007	23	24*
YTD 2008	9	7

\* Some cases involved multiple suspects

These statistics are a good measure of our overall success. However, other ancillary factors came about as a result of these efforts and they should be included in the review of this program. Those identified issues include:

- Meetings were organized with Hispanic workers using an innovative approach to gain their trust and learn more about the attacks
- Meeting with business owners, Hispanic employees led to the distribution of flyers warning potential victims of the attacks enhancing the relationship between police, victims and business owners.
- Another positive garnered at these meetings was having Hispanic groups, business leaders and members of the NAACP meet and work together to reduce crime. Community meetings continue regarding the need to reduce hate-motivated behavior.
- The District Attorney’s Office worked closely with detectives to facilitate the filing of robbery/assault and hate crime enhancements whenever possible.

Operation Safe City has had a more widespread effect on crime in the city than just curtailing street robberies and violent street assaults. In 2008 there have been no homicides and only one in the past 8 months. There were 11 in 2007.

In 2008 there have been 104 robberies and only nine have been identified as Youth Street Attacks representing an 84% reduction in these crimes since the end of 2006. In 2008, the overall number of assaults is down 17% in the past three months.

**Agency Information**

The Operation Safe City task force consisted of one division commander, one detective lieutenant, one field sergeant, one detective sergeant, two corporals, two motor officers, and one community services officer. There was also a significant contribution by a Deputy District Attorney from the Los Angeles District Attorneys Office, Juvenile Division.

The Pasadena Police Department's organizational philosophy to combating crime is rooted in the words, "Excellence, Innovation, and Integrity." It is clear that this prestigious award looks to recognize innovative approaches to policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Pasadena Police Department hopes their efforts to combat and essentially end a disturbing crime trend qualifies us as worthy applicants and we would be truly honored if we were selected as the 2008 recipient of the Herman Goldstein Award.

If there are any questions about the information outlined above, please contact:

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