



## Niagara County Sheriff's Office

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James R. Voutour

Sheriff

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Undersheriff

# OPERATION PANTHER PRIDE



## Summary

*“No efforts at restoring order in the community will be successful in the long run without the development of a full partnership between citizens in the community and the criminal justice institutions that affect conditions in their neighborhoods.”<sup>1</sup>*

Operation Panther Pride was a law enforcement initiative which integrated methods of problem-oriented policing by combining a broken windows approach to the community while implementing a zero tolerance enforcement strategy in the treatment and processing of targeted offenders within the directed geographic area of responsibility.

## *Scanning*

In late October of 2010, Niagara County Sheriff's Office (NCSO) under the direction of Sheriff James R. Voutour began to gather information related to a local community problem located within the village of Newfane. Members of the Newfane Business Association expressed valid concerns related to a steady increase in criminal activity. A public meeting was scheduled involving members of the local business community along with state and local officials entrusted to address this community uproar related to specific problems within this once quiet community. These problems focused on Main Street in the village of Newfane, which became the geographic target of this enforcement initiative. The project became known as Operation Panther Pride, named after the localities hometown mascot, the Newfane Panther.

## *Analysis*

Data examined related to police calls for service in Newfane during a two-year period preceding Operation Panther Pride yielded 10,723 calls. The average bi-weekly call volume indicated 206 calls during this time frame. Prior to the onset of this initiative call volume spiked to 259 (two week period), thus confirming local businesses' fears. It became obvious that a solution was needed to address these neighborhood concerns.

## *Response*

Working in partnership with the community and its members, the Niagara County Sheriff's Office aimed to foster improved communication and restore neighborhood confidence through a multitude of techniques ranging from seeking public input to the implementation of zero tolerance enforcement to specific offenses. Sheriff James R. Voutour implemented a targeted 10-point action plan of attack aimed at repairing the identified “broken windows” along Main Street in Newfane. Operation Panther Pride could not have been successful without agency cooperation, community collaboration, relentless follow through, and increased accountability of project members.

<sup>1</sup> Kelling, George, L and Coles, Catherine, M (1996), Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring order and reducing crime in our communities. New York, NY.

***Assessment***

- **31% decrease** in calls for service following the termination of Operation Panther Pride.
- **60% reduction** in crime reports over time.
- Improved Police-Community Relations.
- No added overtime expense burdened for staffing put upon taxpayers.
- Implemented a process that will be utilized in the same and other jurisdictions in response to problems.

## Project Description

### Scanning

**Background:** Niagara County Sheriff James R. Voutour was contacted by New York State Senator Maziarz's office to schedule a meeting regarding concerns of the Newfane Business Association. Members of the Newfane Business Association expressed valid concerns that there was a steady increase in criminal activity along Main Street in Newfane. This crime affected the ability of those businesses along the Main Street corridor to operate and maintain customers. Members of the local Newfane Business Association discussed many problems that needed to be addressed and enlisted upon elected officials and members of the Niagara County Sheriff's Office to assist in implementing a strategy to combat this neighborhood problem.

**Nature of the Problem:** The Newfane Business Association reported that they witnessed what appeared to be drug dealing on a daily basis along the 2700 block of Main Street in the village of Newfane. The dealing was occurring behind numerous apartments near 2712 and 2714 Main Street. It was reported that many high school age children gather before school, around 7:00 am, near these apartments and they may have been involved in drug activity. They also reported new graffiti in the area of the old Kerwin's gas station (a vacant property). The drug activity has led to questionable characters loitering around Main Street causing unnecessary fear of customers and area business owners.

Newfane is a small rural community located within Niagara County, New York. It is situated in northwestern upstate New York near Niagara Falls. Lake Ontario is the massive body of water that separates Newfane from our northern Canadian border. As of the 2000 census, there were 3,129 people residing in the village with a total area of 4.7 square miles none of which is covered with water. The Niagara County Sheriff's Office is the primary law enforcement authority for

this particular area within the county. The police division consists of 112 sworn law enforcement personnel and 43 civilian members working together to achieve a safe community for residents and visitors of any of the twelve townships located within Niagara County with a population of approximately 214,557.<sup>2</sup> (*See Appendices Map 1.1*)

## **Analysis**

Members of the Niagara County Sheriff's Office partnered with community members by devising a plan to gain as much specific information related to the stated problem. This included but was not limited to: 1) Information known by the police and; 2) Information known by community stakeholders related to crime and offenders perceived to be active within the Newfane area.

The Police/Community partnership described consisted of five sworn law enforcement officials to include the Sheriff along with eight civilian's comprising of school, church, business, and elected officials within the Newfane community.

Selected law enforcement personnel were summoned to individually report their specific knowledge of the recent crime problems and timely respond directly to the Sheriff. Topics included in the problem analysis consisted of information related to recent activity to include: (1) Pertinent calls for service, (2) crime sprees, (3) recent trends, (4) identification of known offenders and suspects, (5) dates and times of activity, and (6) specific crime locations.

Collectively, information was developed and shared between members of the police community partnership at the meeting held on October 27th, 2010. Analysis of activity revealed a slight increase in calls for service related to quality of life issues in a rural middle-class community. Specifically, problems related to residential burglaries, drug dealing, area blight (graffiti markings), and loitering of drug users contributed to the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.census.gov>

increased fear for local residents and business owners within the Newfane community.

Members in attendance were able to provide useful information of suspects, apartments and vehicles for investigation.

Through collaboration, investigation and research, team members learned that many buildings along Main Street had multiple tenant occupied residences with landlords residing outside the area, and in many instances, “unaware”<sup>3</sup> of problems related to current tenants and the presence of graffiti markings on their properties. A primary mission became to enlist upon these landlords for cooperation. Additionally, prescription drug abuse of opiate based pills became the drug of choice among users. Addictions associated with these pills led to an increase of hypodermic heroin use and residential burglaries within the community.

Examination of trends over a two year period (October 1, 2008 - October 1, 2010), indicated that Newfane’s call volume is significantly higher than other comparable townships within Niagara County. Newfane averaged 223 calls for service every two weeks (446 per month). The Town of Porter (population 6771) averaged 91 calls for service every two weeks (181 per month). Although Porter is less densely populated than Newfane, latest census information reveal 6771; 9666, respectively. These figures represent 30% greater population within Newfane, yet the Sheriff’s Office responds to twice (60% more) the police calls for service over the two year period studied. Two weeks immediately preceding Operation Panther Pride revealed call volume in the Town of Newfane at 259. This increase in police activity, coupled with the specific complaints, were the key factors leading to the need for a calculated police response.

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<sup>3</sup> “Unaware”- refers to landlord’s possibly turning a blind eye to known problems. Through personal contact with property owners, issues identified with their properties became a priority.

*Crime data collected from over four weeks (September 25<sup>th</sup> - October 27<sup>th</sup> 2010) leading up to*

*this initiative reveal the following:*

*Larceny (13)*

*Domestic Incidents (12)*

*Burglary (4)*

*Violation of Court Orders (4)*

*Drug Offenses (4)*

*Criminal Mischief (3)*

*Juvenile Problem (3)*

Although not the most violent, these data illustrate the relative nature of crime from region to region. In late October of 2010, however, they represent enough activity for a small close-knit business community in Newfane, NY to implore specific strategies aimed to combat relevant problems within their own community.

## **Response**

In reaction to community problems, often primary concerns facing police administrators' is the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the project. Operation Panther Pride was an actionable response to community problems without creating added overtime expenditures for increased police coverage. Rather, it directed a targeted response with resources available at the time. Niagara County Sheriff James R. Voutour implemented a targeted 10-point action plan of attack aimed at repairing the identified "broken windows" along Main Street in Newfane.

**The Sheriff's 10-point action plan which was developed following a detailed analysis is outlined below:** (\* = Specific POP strategy deployed)

1. ***Maintain interagency communication.*** Maintain open lines of communication between affected NCSO personnel, all shifts, divisions, and continually update each other with related issues, and arrests.
2. ***\*Apply intensive police enforcement.*** Implement a "zero tolerance" method of enforcement within the problem area for a sustained period of time (two weeks). Supply Newfane School Resource Officer with a marked vehicle, two days a week for the next few weeks, starting October 28<sup>th</sup> to identify offenders on the street from the high school and to address truancy issues. The high school principals are authorized to ride along as needed to assist.
3. ***\*Strict enforcement of the curfew laws.*** Those under the age of 16 will be taken home and their parents will be issued appearance tickets for child endangerment related charges

4. *Utilize current Crime Intelligence*<sup>4</sup> to identify current offenders in the area and continually share information related to any new intelligence that develops as a result of continued investigations.
5. *\*Identification of tenants and nearby residents with drug histories.* Narcotics unit ordered to step up their investigations into sales and street level users and take action as appropriate.
6. *\*Increase place guardianship* by contacting property owners' help in closing a drug market to clean graffiti and evict drug dealers.
7. Work with local building inspectors to identify absentee landlords and *\*apply civil remedies, including abatement proceedings with problem residences.*
8. *\*Warrant sweeps* of suspects residing within the vicinity of the target area.
9. *\*Increase place guardianship.* Utilize all available resources to the problem area to address crime issues, gather information and speak to business owners and members of the community. Town Justices were notified of neighborhood problem and current law enforcement strategy.
10. Deployment of Field Intelligence Officers into the problem area during strategic hours in unmarked vehicle(s) to *identify offenders and gather actionable intelligence.*

*(See Appendices Table 1-1 )*

This directed response fostered improved police-community communication and restored neighborhood confidence which ultimately resulted in a sustained reduction of reported crime incidents. Operation Panther Pride could not have been successful without agency cooperation, community collaboration, relentless follow through, and increasing accountability to project members.

## **Assessment**

Operation Panther Pride commenced on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Primary focus was given to Main Street in a block consisting of most of the Newfane Business District. In addition to the project's resourcefulness, the success of Operation Panther Pride is attributed in part to the length of the initiative itself. The fact that measurable results were produced and sustained in only two weeks coupled with the tremendous cost savings afforded to the taxpayers of Niagara County (no overtime allocated) speaks volumes in the measurement of this projects' effectiveness. Through a targeted approach, utilizing methods defined by Professor Herman Goldstein in Problem Oriented Policing<sup>5</sup>, Sheriff Voutour and the Niagara County Sheriff's Office with assistance

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<sup>4</sup> Ratcliffe, J. H. (2007) 'Integrated intelligence and crime analysis: enhanced information management for law enforcement leaders'. Washington, DC: Police Foundation.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.popcenter.org/>

from the public through Operation Panther Pride were able to clean up neighborhood blight and instill a sense of serenity back into the Newfane community.

Additionally, success was measured through data collection with the assistance of proactive police and community stakeholders monitoring activity in effort to guide appropriateness of further response. Agency calls for service over twenty-six weeks (6.5 months) demonstrate the sustained reduction in activity related to initial problems which brought about this initiative.

Calls for service were examined in three separate time frames over a six week period. These two week intervals were defined by the following: (TP= Time Period)

TP 1= Activity leading up to Panther Pride; TP 2= Operation Panther Pride; TP 3= Activity following Panther Pride. **(See Appendices Graph 1.1)**

From TP1 through TP2, calls for service represent a 3.47% increase. These results were expected since targeted patrol should elicit more calls for service in the area of concentration. From TP2 through TP3, calls for service show a favorable decrease from 268 to 210 **(-21.64%)**. Many factors may contribute to the marked decrease of calls in the Newfane region. It may be attributed to less officer initiation following the operation and/or the lack of “suspicious activity” warranting a deputy’s response, etc..., nevertheless, the calls decreased in the two weeks following the operation.

Such results **(-21.64%)**, remain consistent and expected when we attribute success in measuring the effectiveness of this operation. Results from TP1 (state prior to Panther Pride) and TP3 (two weeks following Panther Pride) we see a notable decrease in the calls for service in the Newfane area from 259 to 210 **(-18.92%)**. On the contrary, this marked decrease may lead one to infer that crime has gone down when in fact it was merely calls for service in the community. Regardless, it is correct to assert that calls for service in the Newfane area were less in the time period immediately following

the operation (210) when compared to the start of this operation (259), equaling less need for police response while keeping all things constant.

Furthermore, data examined reveal that calls for service three months following Operation Panther Pride yield yet more significant results. The average calls for service for three months following this initiative are 184 calls (every two weeks). Recall that during Operation Panther Pride calls were at 268. Remarkably, these findings represent a **31% decrease** in calls for service following the termination of this directed response. (*See Appendices Graph 1.2*)

A comparison of crime reports four weeks prior to and four weeks following Operation Panther Pride demonstrate a **60% reduction** in crime reports. While an examination of crime reports within a similar jurisdiction (*Town of Porter*) divulge no marked decrease (**7%**), absent a POP strategy. (*See Appendices Table 2.1; 2.2*)

Despite the vast reduction in calls for service and crimes reported following Operation Panther Pride, consideration was given to potential seasonal affects that may have warranted the changes described. Following an examination of five years of call data (2006-2010) for six week interval pre and post initiation, it was determined that calls spiked in 2010 during the period of this operation. As demonstrated in **Graph 1.3** (*see appendices*) calls averaged approximately 613 over four years prior to this initiative, while 749 became the new figure in 2010.

***Results directly related to this law enforcement initiative reveal the following:***

**Panther Pride Results**- *Total arrests (15); Non-warrant related arrests (6); Warrants cleared (9); Drug informants cultivated (2); Homeowner notifications related to neighborhood blight (3) Building code violations (1); Informants developed were responsible for (5) felony indictments totaling (17) B felonies and (1) C felony.*

Through the integration of multiple law enforcement strategies Operation Panther Pride combined a broken windows approach to the community while implementing a zero tolerance enforcement strategy in the treatment and processing of targeted offenders. The initiative focused on identifying the root of the problems facing a small rural community within Newfane, NY.

Like, the *Problem Analysis Triangle* and *Routine Activities Theory*, this initiative addressed community issues and achieved success in several ways. They are: (1) Removing the opportunity for crime by targeting and removing motivated offenders within the community, (2) target hardening to remove the opportunity for crimes, and (3) educating public leaders and community stakeholders to encourage and foster improved guardianship.

Our findings clearly indicate a sustained reduction in calls for service directly related to the neighborhood problems identified at the onset of this task, thus making this project a marked success for local law enforcement and members of the Newfane business community. Some of the measured reduction may be attributed to displacement of offenders due to strict enforcement methods utilized under Operation Panther Pride. However, we believe that the Niagara County Sheriff's Office under the direction of Sheriff James R. Voutour, worked closely with the community to foster an environment where crime and neighborhood chaos was at the very least, manageable.

Crime will undoubtedly rise again in the not too distant future. Nevertheless, it is the implementation of significant, cost effective strategies which assist in keeping law enforcement efficient in a criminal environment where resourcefulness is a shared responsibility between the people. Strategies such as Operation Panther Pride are in place and prepared for immediate deployment when necessary. On behalf of the Niagara County Sheriff's Office, local citizens, and members of the Newfane business community partnership.... stay safe and "Go Panthers!"

## **Agency and Officer Information**

### ***Key Project Team Members:***

1. Sheriff James R. Voutour (NCSO)
2. Chief Deputy Steven Preisch (NCSO)
3. Deputy Todd Ostrowski (NCSO)
4. Deputy Joseph Flagler (NCSO)
5. Deputy Justin Birmingham, (NCSO)
6. Jim Ward (Senator Maziarz Office)
7. Town Supervisor Tim Horanburg
8. Superintendent Chris Tibbetts
9. Principal Steve Burley (Newfane Central High School)
10. Assistant Principal Tom Stack (Newfane Central High School)
11. Sue Neidlinger, (Newfane Bus Association)
12. Janet Steggles (Newfane Bus Association)
13. Reverend Kim Smith (United Methodist Church)

### ***Project Contact Person:***

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## APPENDICES (Table 1.1)

(\* = Specific POP strategy deployed)

ANALYSIS	RESPONSE <i>The Sheriff's 10-point action plan</i>
Due to the nature of the bureaucratic structure and shift work in policing, ineffective information sharing and lack of follow-up often results.	11. <b>Maintain interagency communication.</b> Maintain open lines of communication between affected NCSO personnel, all shifts, divisions, and continually update each other with related issues, and arrests.
Reports of truancy from school aged youth possibly buying drugs and loitering around private businesses along Main Street.	12. <b>*Apply intensive police enforcement.</b> Implement a “zero tolerance” method of enforcement within the problem area for a sustained period of time (two weeks). Supply Newfane School Resource Officer with a marked vehicle, two days a week for the next few weeks, starting October 28 <sup>th</sup> to identify offenders on the street from the high school and to address truancy issues. The high school principals are authorized to ride along as needed to assist.
Teenaged youth loitering in and around Main Street all hours of the night.	13. <b>*Strict enforcement of the curfew laws.</b> Those under the age of 16 will be taken home and their parents will be issued appearance tickets for child endangerment related charges
Analysis of calls for service identified several targets residing within the area that may have been the cause of many of the problems.	14. <b>Utilize current Crime Intelligence<sup>6</sup></b> to identify current offenders in the area and continually share information related to any new intelligence that develops as a result of continued investigations.
Identification of emerging drug epidemic surrounding the abuse of opiate based prescription pills.	15. <b>*Identification of tenants and nearby residents with drug histories.</b> Narcotics unit ordered to step up their investigations into sales and street level users and take action as appropriate.
Multiple apartments rented by landlords who reside outside of the area.	16. <b>*Increase place guardianship</b> by contacting property owners’ help in closing a drug market to clean graffiti and evict drug dealers.
Multiple low-income apartments within the business district occupied by many of the drug targets.	17. Work with local building inspectors to identify absentee landlords and <b>*apply civil remedies, including abatement proceedings with problem residences.</b>
Some identified drug targets had outstanding warrants.	18. <b>*Warrant sweeps</b> of suspects residing within the vicinity of the target area.
Community involvement and stakeholder identification.	19. <b>*Increase place guardianship.</b> Utilize all available resources to the problem area to address crime issues, gather information and speak to business owners and members of the community. Town Justices were notified of neighborhood problem and current law enforcement strategy.
Intelligence-led policing as a focal point in our agencies crime prevention strategies to assist in better allocation of resources.	20. Deployment of Field Intelligence Officers into the problem area during strategic hours in unmarked vehicle(s) to <b>identify offenders and gather actionable intelligence.</b>

<sup>6</sup> Ratcliffe, J. H. (2007) ‘Integrated intelligence and crime analysis: enhanced information management for law enforcement leaders’. Washington, DC: Police Foundation.

**APPENDICES (Table 2.1)**

*Comparison of crime reports four weeks prior to and four weeks following Operation Panther Pride.*

AREA	Crime Type	9/25/10 to 10/27/10	11/11/10 to 12/10/10	% Change
Town of Newfane	Larceny	13	8	(38)
Town of Newfane	Domestic Incidents	12	5	(58)
Town of Newfane	Burglary	4	1	(75)
Town of Newfane	Violation of Court Orders	4	1	(75)
Town of Newfane	Drug Offenses	4	0	(100)
Town of Newfane	Criminal Mischief	3	1	(67)
Town of Newfane	Juvenile Problem	3	1	(67)
<b>Total</b>		43	17	(60)

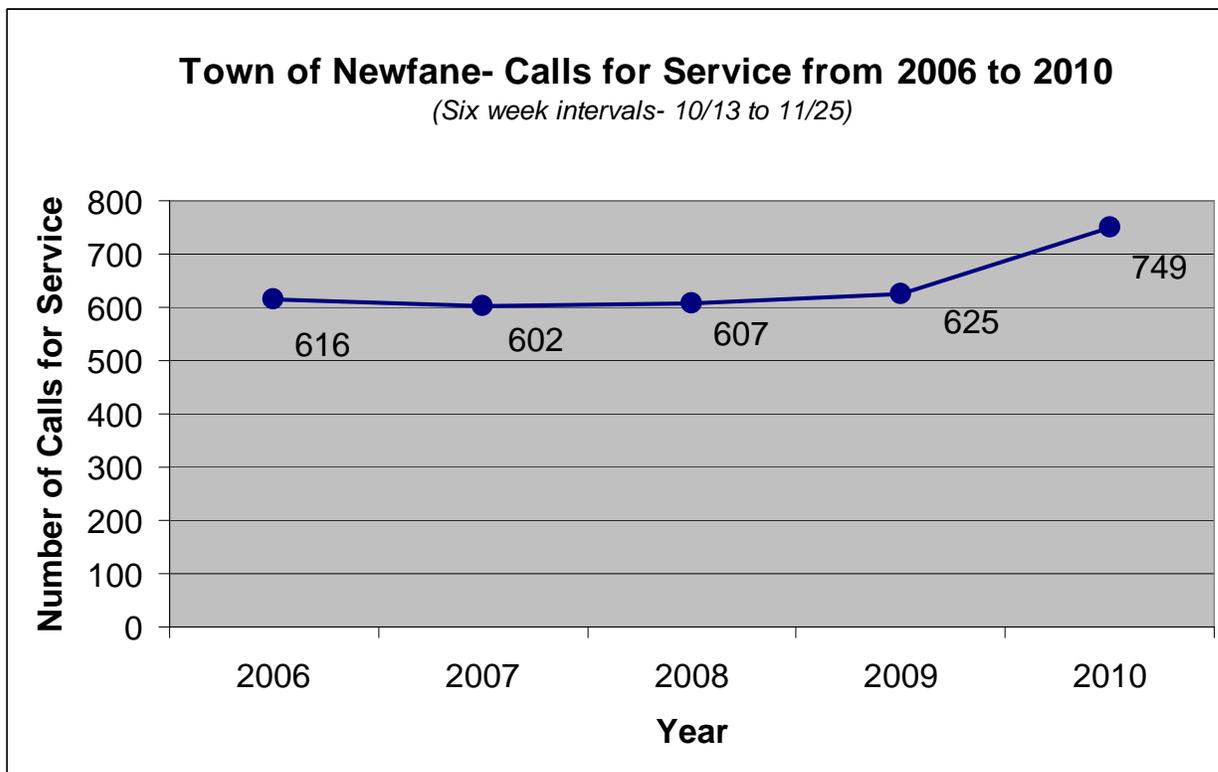
**APPENDICES (Table 2.2)**

*\* Town of Porter is a comparable jurisdiction with no interdiction strategy during the stated time frame*

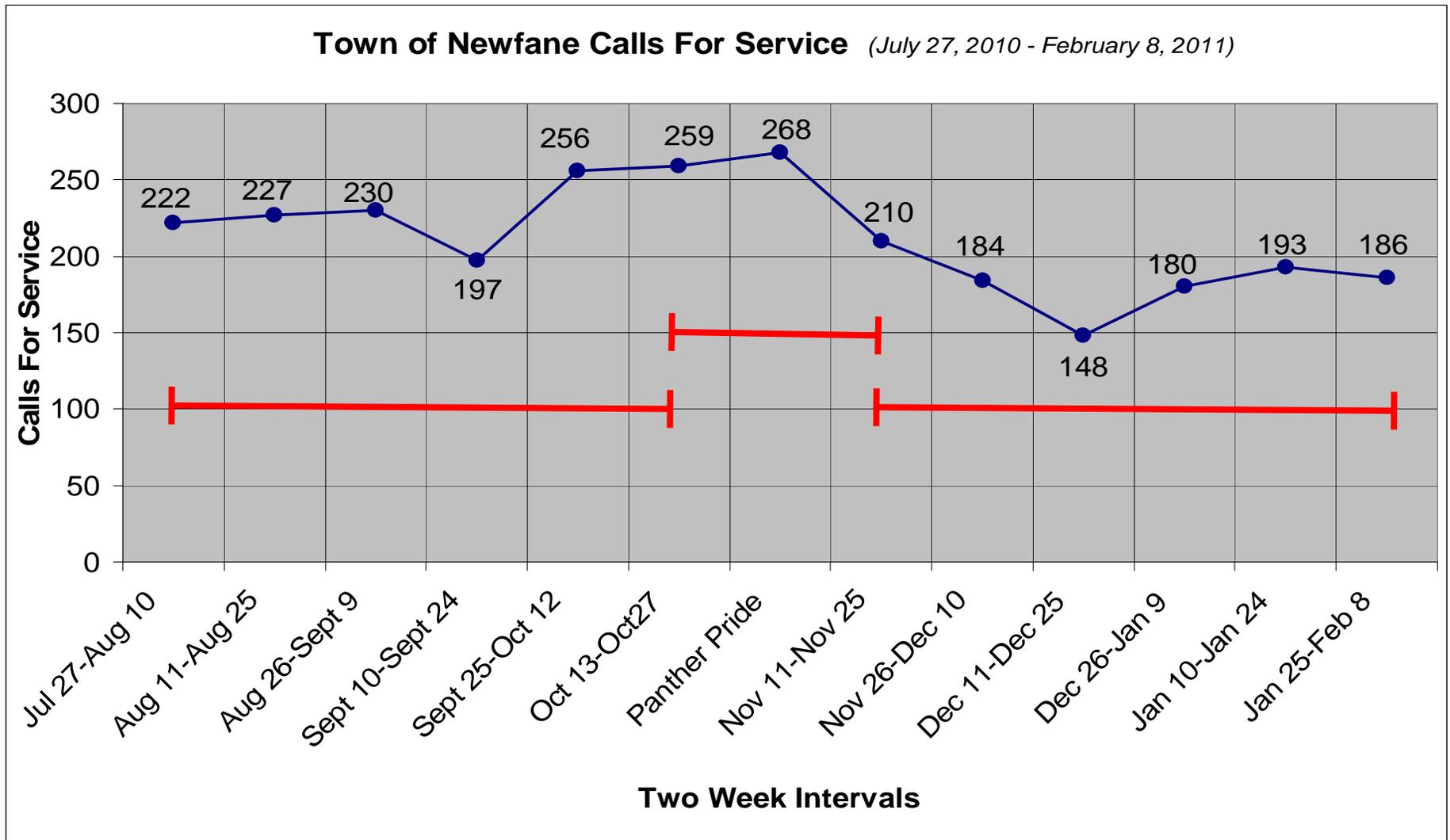
AREA	Crime Type	9/25/10 to 10/27/10	11/11/10 to 12/10/10	% Change
Town of Porter	Larceny	2	2	0
Town of Porter	Domestic Incidents	7	1	(86)
Town of Porter	Burglary	0	3	300
Town of Porter	Stolen Vehicle	2	2	0
Town of Porter	Drug Offenses	0	0	0
Town of Porter	Criminal Mischief	3	5	67
Town of Porter	Juvenile Problem	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>		14	13	(7)

### APPENDICES (Graph 1.3)

To account for variations in season a five year sample of calls for service immediately before and following the period of Operation Panther Pride 2010. Calls averaged approximately 613 in the years prior to this initiative.

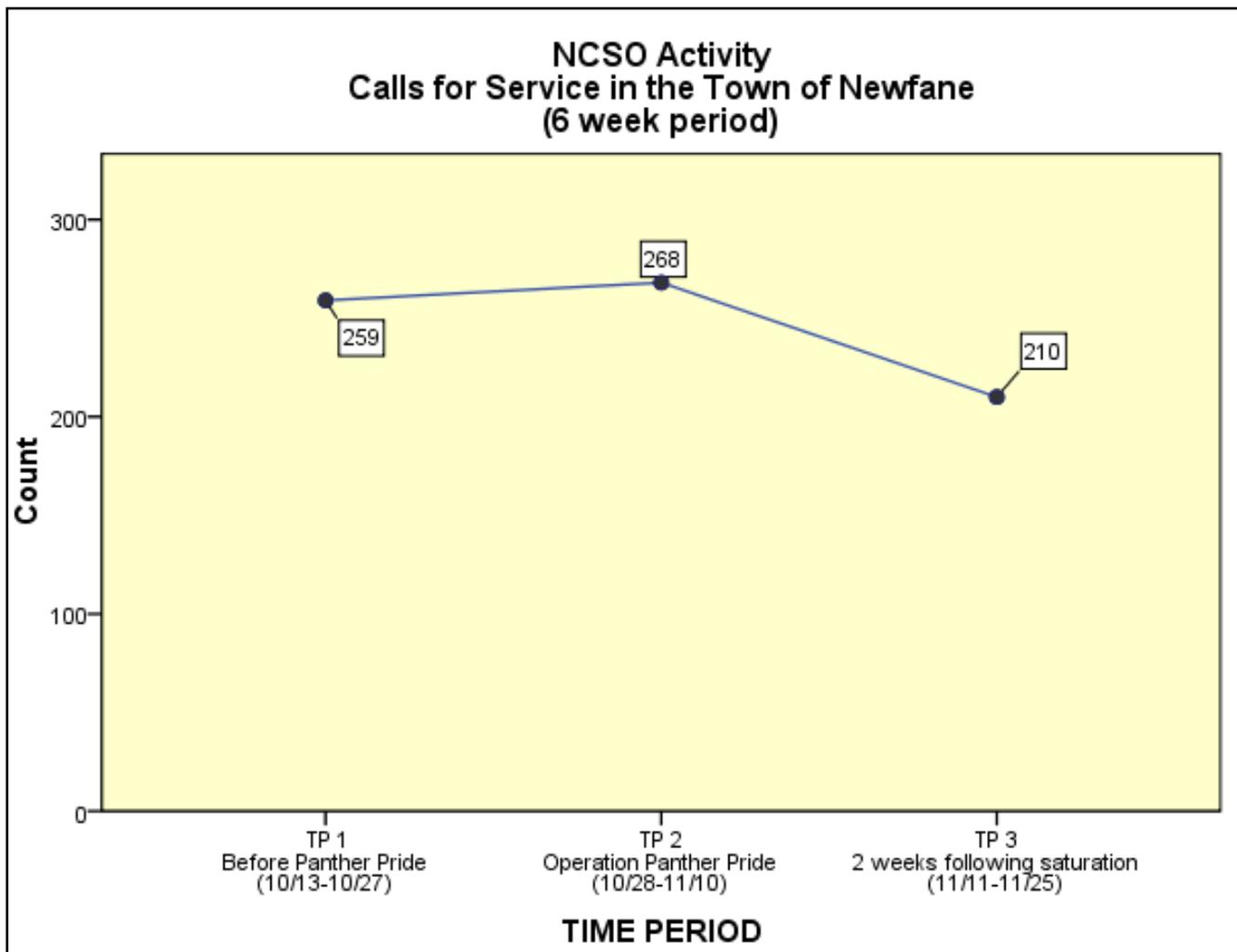


### APPENDICES (Graph 1.2)



## APPENDICES (Graph 1.1)

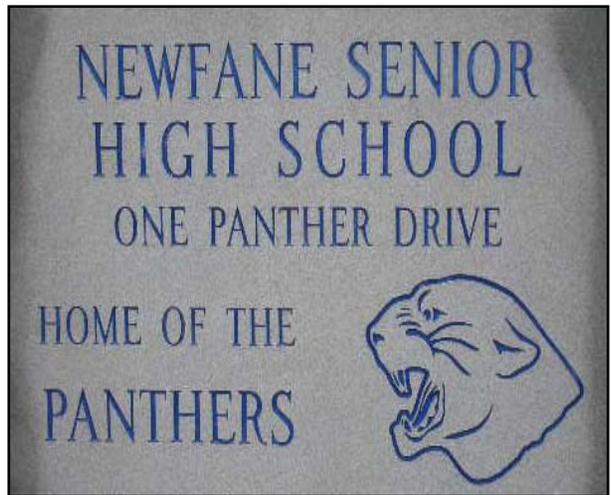
The chart illustrates calls for service in the Newfane area for a six week period. Calls were grouped into three separate time periods.



(TP 1 = Activity leading up to Panther Pride; TP 2 = Operation Panther Pride; TP 3 Activity following Panther Pride. From TP1 through TP2, calls for service represent a 3.47% increase. These results were expected since targeted patrol should elicit more calls for service in the area of concentration.



Before Operation Panther Pride



After Operation Panther Pride



Kerwin's Gas Station



Site of former Kerwin's Gas Station



Before Operation Panther Pride



After Operation Panther Pride





# Village of Newfane - Operation Panther Pride



Law Enforcement Sensitive