

# **Taking Back the Two-Nine**

## **SUMMARY**

### **Scanning**

The 29<sup>th</sup> Street area is a 16-block geographical area consisting of residents, apartment complexes, businesses, schools, and parks. This area has historically been known for issues with violent crime, narcotics, and gang activity with minimal police attention. The statistics showed that violent crime was higher in this area than in a comparable area. The area has numerous apartment complexes that are run-down and an abandoned government building that provided an environment for the criminal element to thrive in. The residents were afraid to go out, did not have faith or trust in the local police department, and upon asking, they re-iterated the issues that were seen.

### **Analysis**

The statistics matched the issues believed when the concerns were initially scanned. A specialized unit was brought back to help with issues within the division. The unit went out into the area, made contact with residents and other entities in the area, and saw the overall condition of the area. It was seen that there were issues with violent crime, narcotics, and gangs. The lack of police enforcement has also provided an environment where the criminals are not in fear. There was no one common element found in that area, so it had to be addressed from a collective approach.

### **Response**

The officers within the specialized unit went out into the community and started to form relationships with the community. This was done through consistent interaction, community

events, and a showing that they wanted to make a difference. Large amounts of work were done with the local apartment complexes, which helped push some of the criminal elements out of the area while also pushing for the cleaning up of the area. Education was given to the community on how to maintain the neighborhood without always needing a direct police approach. Work was done with all age brackets and all areas within the community to make them self-reliant.

### **Assessment**

After the area had been worked for over a year, the statistics were looked at again, and more communication was made with residents. Violent crime was dropped by more than half, and numerous property crimes were reduced when the new statistics were viewed. Numerous community members also voiced their pleasure in the changes that had happened. The attendance and excitement around community events grew substantially while the community became more self-reliant and looked much better overall.

#### **A. Scanning:**

The 29<sup>th</sup> Street Clean-up project was picked because of a historical issue with violent crime, property crime, drug activity, and an underlying gang problem, all within a specific geographical area. The problem was known by both the police who patrol this area and also by the residents and the business owners. The area had a time when the reputation and crime statistics were lower, but due to a lack of staffing and the removal of special units, the crime and issues proceeded to move upward. The 29<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor runs west to east, with the major flow doing eastbound. The corridor is about 16 city blocks west to east, and the area of focus was 29<sup>th</sup> Street and the surrounding neighborhoods to the north and south of the street.

This project was able to be started and worked on due to the department allowing for a unit to be brought back, which was not utilized for an extended period. Known by the “Zebra” designator, the unit was re-established with a focus on community engagement by working problematic areas within the Midtown Division of the Tucson Police Department. The unit consisted of a Sergeant, 2 Officers, and a Community Service Officer. Once the unit was allowed to come back one of the first tasks was to identify areas that needed attention, which this area was on top of the list.

When this project started in 2020, a comparable area was also found for comparable data to gauge if there was statistical change. This was another geographical area with the same types of businesses and residential areas. The violent crime statistics were higher in the area to be worked in and the property crime rate was slightly higher in the comparable area (See Appendix A).

Before tackling the problem, the members of this unit gathered statistics, went to get a deeper visual on the area, and also started speaking to members of the community. Upon checking all of the above, it was seen that this area matched the reputation in statistics and what was observed. The overall information showed that the crime rate in this area was high and the only approach at that time to help out with the issue was when department members went to that location for calls for service. There was a minimal proactive approach to help out with that problem at that time.

When speaking to residents that lived in this area there was a general dislike and a distrust for police. They were so accustomed to the crime in the area and that the police only responded after the crime had occurred to the point that they believed the police were of no help.

There was no proactive approach to the police helping the neighborhood. Many were afraid to leave their homes and walk down the street, especially after the sun had gone down. They did not have any community events, many of the apartment complexes appeared to be run-down, and there was no overarching pride in the community. This area was overseen by two Wards; which are two separate city council offices that oversaw this area. The community had a Kindergarten through eighth-grade school, a Boys and Girls Club, and a large park with numerous amenities. There are ten apartment complexes and a four-lane east-west road that covers this area. It is close to one of the major roadways across the city, which comes from downtown off the one major interstate that goes through the city.

Tucson was the 33<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the nation and at that time had a population of 543,242, and at that time, the Tucson Police Department had a staffing of 765 sworn officers.

## **B. Analysis:**

When analyzing the problem, the data came from crime statistics, interviews with those in the area, and included site visits. Many families have lived in that area for multiple generations. Some of the families who have lived there for an extended period were involved in gang and narcotic activities. Some of those who were committing the crimes lived in the area, and others chose to commit crimes in that area because of the knowledge that the area was not worked by the police regularly. In this area there was also a section of the community that consisted of refugee population. Many of them were not aware of the American laws, were afraid of the police, and did not call due to fear. This created an environment where they were victimized at a higher, unreported rate that needed to be addressed.

Analysis of this area was done from multiple angles, including data analysis, observations in the community, and talking to those who lived in the area. Statistics were pulled from the geographic area, which included the area that was 16 city blocks in length from west to east around a street that was a major thoroughfare in the city. The area also included two blocks, both north and south of this street. This area had numerous businesses, schools, apartment complexes, and residents. Officers from the Zebra Unit drove through the area on a regular basis. At the beginning of the project the officers noted areas that were not taken care of including several apartment complexes which appeared to have not been up kept for several years. This included numerous broken-down vehicles in the parking lots, boarded-up units, graffiti and narcotic paraphernalia around the complexes. There were numerous plazas with empty businesses where the local homeless population would congregate. On the corner of one of the bigger intersections was an old Arizona Department of Economic Security complex that had been vacant for years and was a spot where the homeless would camp, use their narcotics, and do other criminal activities. At that location, there were numerous overdoses, a few arsons, and homicides. The regular residents normally would not walk up and down the streets unless they had to because they were in fear of the criminals and gang members who walked in this area. The area was primarily controlled by the 29<sup>th</sup> Street Bloods, one of the city's older street gangs. The street gang had members that were multiple generations old, and they had no problem controlling by fear. Their crimes consisted anywhere from property crimes, narcotic sales, up to homicide. Those who resided in that area were low-income and many refugee families were incorporated into the area.

The area had been known as a problematic area for numerous years, with a negative stigma around it, and everyone knew of the bad reputation. Those involved included local

residents and business owners who were both the victims and the offenders. Those who lived in the area and committed the crime knew that that area was not well-patrolled, so there was nothing truly holding them back. At the same time, there were numerous multi-generational gang and narcotic families.

Violent and property crime affected many in the community in one way or another but on two different levels. The property crime affected all who lived in the community, but the violent crime was seen to be targeted more toward specific individuals who lived in the area. The overall property did not have the best appearance and the community was afraid to go out and about in their own community. Not many proactive approaches were going on during that time and most police contact was reactive.

The crime was committed at all hours of day and night. The best understanding of the problem came from those who lived in the community who spoke of the fear of both the police as well as the criminal element within. Further studies were done about more specific geographical areas, such as apartment complexes, to see if one was of a higher number than others, showing as a bigger need to be addressed. There were numerous apartment complexes that showed issues but the area was to be worked as a bigger collective location, which was decided upon to make a larger impact.

The community knew that the problem was going on, but they did not call for local police as often as they should due to a level of fear that there would be repercussions or that the police would not respond. The community did not have events where local residents would gather as a collective whole. There did not seem to be any kind of ownership of the community by those who lived there. The overall conditions of the neighborhood were not of the highest quality and

the residents did not have ownership of their community. When an area is neglected as this one was, it goes along with the broken window theory.

The criminals who had made prey of this area did so because they believed that the local police department was not actively working the area so they felt confident to commit crimes with no fear of anyone. Due to fear of retaliation many of the residents would not say anything to the police. If there was a crime, especially by the local gang members, the common response by those in the area was that they did not see anything, they did not want to be a victim of a crime, and there was a very high level of uncooperativeness from the resident to the police when they did come into the area.

Due to these issues, many of the residents in the area lived in fear and were afraid to enjoy their neighborhood, which included numerous restaurants and a few local parks to include a larger city park with many community resources in it. If there was a community event, it was not well attended because of that overarching fear that many of the residents had. There were a few apartment complexes where criminals would store stolen vehicles because there was not a lot of proactive patrol that would go and check the areas. The vehicles could be sitting there for days, if not longer, and would not be checked at all. Some apartment managers would know who the problematic tenants were but did not talk to the police because they felt that they would not do anything, and the same feeling was also felt by the local residents. Over time, they would not call 911 due to either a slow response, being diverted to other reporting methods, or feeling of no follow-up after the initial call for service.

Due to numerous issues going on within the police department, including a lack of officers due to very high turnover as well as a large cut to the department, it was not always

feasible for officers to work the area proactively, and if they did have time to do proactive work, this was not always the area picked due to numerous factors including the level of crime and lack of cooperation from the community. Most of the time, the officers would only respond to the area if there was a call for service. This was well known throughout the community, and because of this, it was difficult to make a difference. There were a few officers who would try to patrol the area, but due to the extent of the problem it was very difficult for one officer to really make any kind of noticeable difference in the area. Even if they recovered a stolen vehicle or made a good arrest, that impact was so minimal that it did not have a larger or lasting impact on the community.

The analysis of the problem showed that the issues went throughout the entire geographical issue and it would be a larger problem that would have to be approached from different angles simultaneously. The problem was a combination of criminals living and working in the area with no fear, the community members being too afraid to address the problem or cooperative with the police, and many business and apartment complex managers not wanting to do anything at all because they felt they would have no support from the local police department. The local K-8 school had many students who were 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation gangster or drug dealer or who came from refugee families and so did not think there was anything else for them in their future. Many would follow in the footsteps of their parents.

Upon checking there was no single correlating factor when it came to what was going on in that community. This was a problem that was multi-faceted and spread throughout the area. Due to the collective issues, this was an area that was ideal for those that wanted to commit crimes and not worry about repercussions. There was no fear of the community talking, and if a



crime was committed, it would be very easy to blend into the community, or with numerous side streets and walkways, they could have an avenue of escape.

### **C. Response:**

Reducing crime within the geographical area and creating an environment where individuals feel safe coming out in their community was one of the biggest goals of the project. The overall success could be seen through statistics, by interviews of those in the community, and the observation of improvements in the community.

Getting more community involvement creates a situation where the ownership of the community will naturally reduce crime without police involvement. Through consistent interactions with the community, the local police start to develop larger levels of trust in them. Coming out on a more frequent basis and being in the community will help create a change, which will show a large change in growth in the community. Other city resources should also be used in order to take care of non-crime-related issues such as code enforcement and other government entities. The overall totality of utilizing multiple resources, in that matter, will create a larger, more long-lasting effect. Many times, the community will complain about issues that are not specifically police issues, so having other entities that can also assist in those issues will help solve the community's issues and, at the same time, help promote trust in the police for finding a solution to the community's problems.

Police response might help to reduce the crime numbers in the area for a short period of time, but without proper ownership of the community by the residents and businesses, it would not become a long-term solution.

The specialized unit, as well as some of the regular squads, had to start showing a consistent showing in that community. Not only when a call for service was there but also driving through the area, waving at residents, and parking in the area to watch what is going on, to take a momentary break, or to work on paperwork. To get a productive level of growth in that area was going to take a combined effort from local community members, businesses, government entities, and the police department.

Police interaction within the community had to grow in areas outside of just the times when police come into a community for a call for service. Meetings of the residents and business owners to work on the problem as a whole was a great step, which happened on a monthly basis through meetings of a specific group called the 29<sup>th</sup> Street Coalition. This was a meeting of residents, business owners, apartment complex management, school entities, government representation, and the local police department. This not only gave a chance for the positive interactions to happen but also gave a way for residents to have a voice about what they saw was issues in the community. This also helped create support for community events and other changes in the community. Then, one of the next steps was to start community projects, which included community clean-ups, holiday events, special events at the local parks and also the Boys and Girls Club. At the same time, Officers started getting into the local school to work with the next generation to continue the efforts. This helped break down pre-set opinions that the kids had about police officers and also gave a chance for the police officers to work with the kids to teach them life skills to help prevent some of them from going down the wrong path, creating more incidents within the community. (See Appendix B & C).

While this was going on, the specialized unit made contacts with the areas within the geographical area that had the higher levels of crime. They started working on this area by

enforcing laws, but also working with the local apartment complexes to help find ways to move those who were problematic out the area and lowering crime rates, safer area for the remaining residents.

At that time, the biggest problems were the violent crime, stolen vehicles, and catalytic converter thefts. The violent crime issue was approached with help from other specialized units who work in a total to make apprehensions on many of those connected to violent crime and also show a constant presence while also helping the management in evicting those who were connected to the violent crime. As a collective group, this approach dropped the violent crime and created an environment where future violent offenders did not want to move into the area.

The stolen vehicles and catalytic converter criminals were defeated by working with apartment management and residents to identify who was responsible for the issues and making numerous arrests. At first, local residents were afraid to talk about what was going on, but as time went on, they started to feel more comfortable talking about the issue because they saw that changes were happening and the area was becoming safer. As a collective whole, this approach worked as well.

This was not an easy approach as there was numerous levels of apprehension at first, but over time, that reduced, and then with the community help, the overall effect was much greater.

#### **D. Assessment:**

When looking at the overall results of this area in comparison to a similar geographic area, the crime statistics in most areas were reduced. The robberies in the area that was worked went down while in the comparison area it remained the same. The aggravated assaults in the area went down by over half, while in the comparison area, the numbers went up. Stolen vehicles

in the area went down by almost 75 percent, while they went up in the comparison area. The only crime that saw some level of increase was burglaries which was up across the entire department during the COVID time frame. In an overall perspective, high-level violent crime went down by over half in the worked area while it went up in the non-worked area (See Appendix A). Some areas of property crime did go down at the same time. When looking at surrounding areas it did not appear that there was any displacement of crime. There were no visible rises in violent crime in any other areas near the targeted area.

On top of the crime numbers going down, the general area also remained looking better than it did. The complexes continue to keep their area kept up, and some even continued to improve their facilities. The overall amount of graffiti in the area also went down in the aftermath of the incident. The community took more ownership of their area which showed by the way that the community looked while driving through the area. Part of the success in this area was due to giving resources to the community so they could handle the problem without police interaction. This included reporting tools like a graffiti removal phone application, contacts to code enforcement, and access to other city entities to help remedy issues.

There were other ways to show the overall level of success in the area, which included comments from the community, more community members feeling comfortable being out in the area, and the growing attendance in community events. Coming directly from the words of a community member and ward representative: (See Appendix D).

"As longtime residents, my husband and I have seen this area go from being less desirable with ongoing crime to a neighborhood that feels safe and a part of a true

community. You see more people out walking their dogs and kids riding their bikes, back to becoming what it once was."

The effects were also worded from an apartment complex manager who had the following to say about the work of the unit:

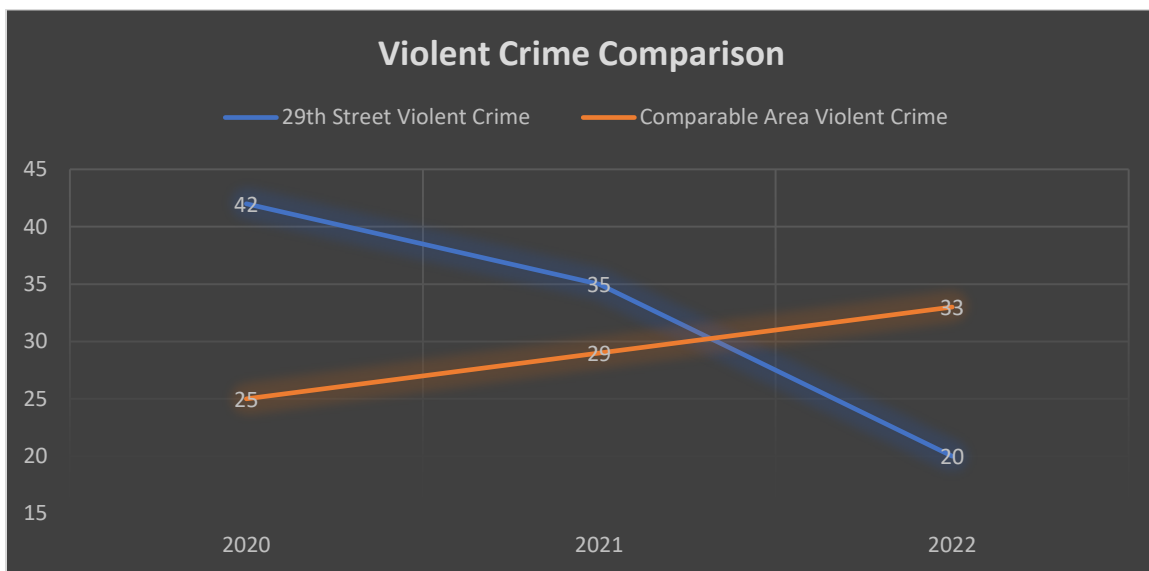
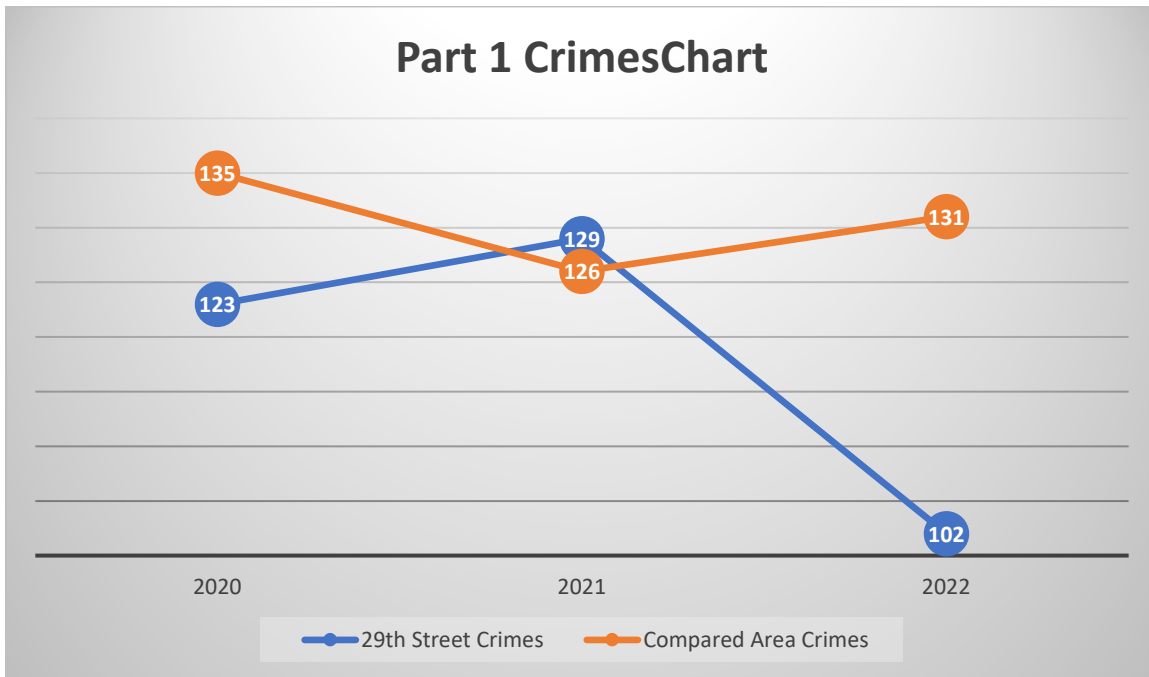
"For years, one of apartment complexes that we owned was always being ran over with crime, anything from break-ins to vacant apartments, vandalized, car theft up to shooting and murders. Once TPD dedicated this time team to this area, they concentrated on being able to show constant presence at this complex by driving through all the time, doing walks/working with management, and educating and speaking with residents to build a relationship with them. With the officers being able to do all of this it helped recover numerous stolen vehicles, wanted criminals, and we saw a community come together again. Kids feel safe to play outside, residents being comfortable calling 911 or non-emergency number to report issues and/or just willing to speak to officers regarding what they may have seen. I can say are crime stats went from sky high prior to this program starting to dropping drastically."

The area is still checked on a regular basis and the monthly coalition meeting continues in an effort to get in front of any problems that rise to keep the area up to the standard that was created.

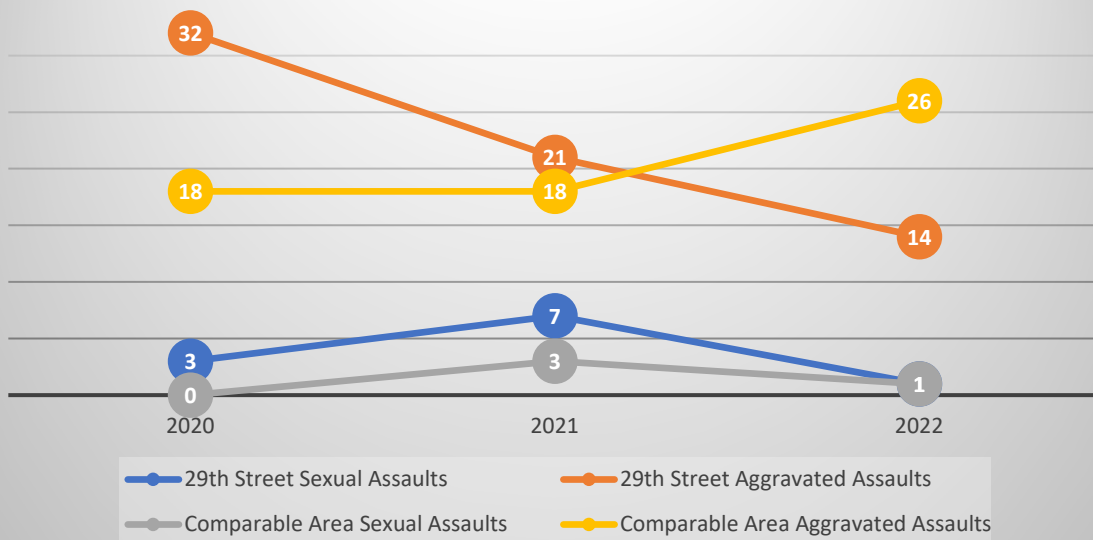
This area was initially picked due to a reputation of being an area with high violent crime, fear from those who lived in it, and an area that needed more police assistance. An analysis was done on the area, which showed truth to the reputation, and a plan to work this area was created. Over time, the police worked on criminal elements while also bringing in

community members, businesses, and other city entities to work on this problem as a collective group. The violent crime statistics did go down, the community members started to feel safer in their neighborhood, the area looks better, and there is a level of ownership on the area as well, all showing a level of success.

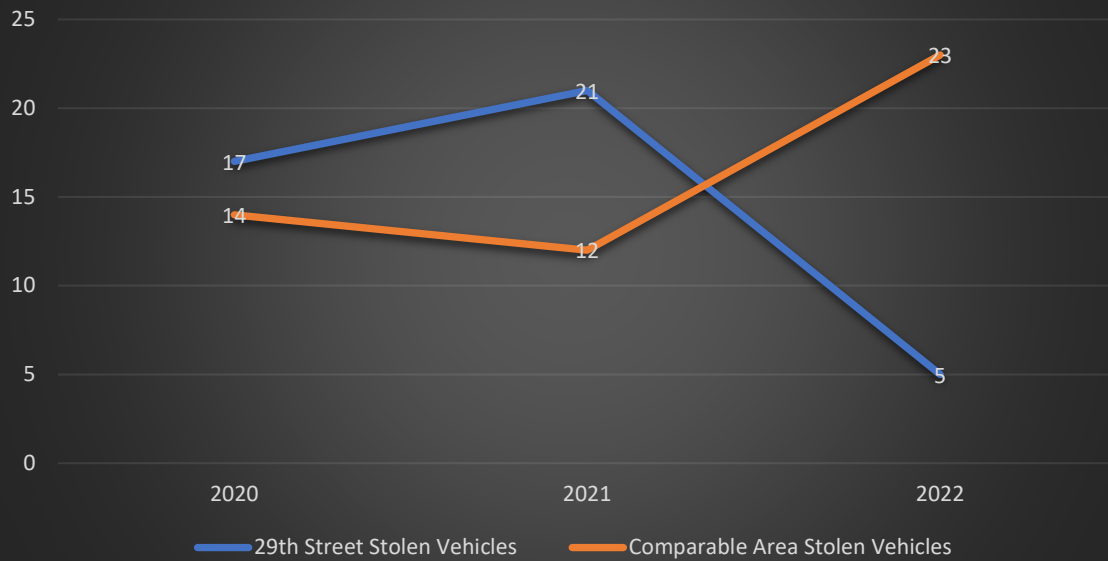
## Appendix A



## Specific Violent Crime Comparison



## Stolen Vehicle Comparison



# Appendix B





# Appendix C



# Appendix D

March 12, 2024

Sgt. Sean Travers  
TPD ODS  
1100 S. Alvernon Way  
Tucson, AZ 85711

Dear Sgt. Travers,

I am sending this letter of support as both a Ward 5 Office Staff Aide and as a constituent near the 29<sup>th</sup> Street corridor.

As longtime residents, my husband and I have seen this area go from being less desirable with ongoing crime, to a neighborhood that feels safe and a part of a true community. This community is where my husband and his siblings attended school and played outside as kids. You see more people out walking their dogs and kids riding their bikes, back to becoming what it once was. This is attributed to your hard work and leadership that includes the great work being done by your Zebra Unit.

As a Ward 5 Council Aide, representing Council Member Richard Fimbres, I have attended the 29<sup>th</sup> Street Coalition meetings since 2018. I personally feel that your monthly meetings have contributed significantly to the area residents and businesses taking ownership and becoming more responsible in creating a safer community. I appreciate that the Zebras are represented at these meetings. They are true professionals who have always been willing to answer serious questions and who have also provided valuable information and updates.

On the community side, the Zebras have provided outreach to the schools and businesses in the area. As well as participating in community events such as "Trunk or Treat" and "Christmas with Santa." The outreach includes going into the classrooms and engaging with the students. This has brought positivity back to our men and women in uniform. This has also led to building trust and a better relationship between our youth and the Tucson Police Department.

Thanks to you and the Zebra Unit, the 29<sup>th</sup> Street corridor continues to get stronger and has become a better and safer community.

Sincerely,

*Mary Kuchar*

Mary Kuchar  
Council Aide  
Ward 5 - City of Tucson  
Council Member Richard G. Fimbres



Craycroft Gardens  
Apartments

5402 E. 30<sup>th</sup> ST Tucson, Az 85711

11/22/2023

I am writing this to showcase the success that I have seen when it comes to having a team of officers not tied to 911 calls and more dedicated to helping the community and business.

I personally had a team of TPD officers that did just this in our community. For years one of apartment complexes that we owned was always being ran over with crime, anything from break ins to vacant apartments, vandalized, car theft up to shooting and murders. Once TPD dedicated this team to this area, they concentrated on being able to show constant presence at this complex, by driving through all the time, doing walks/working with management and educating and speaking with residents to build a relationship with them.

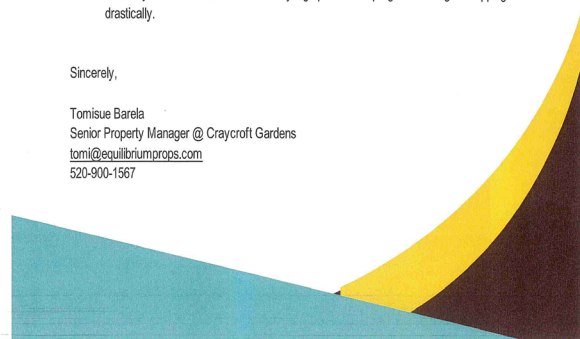
Management was able to call them directly to help with issues. That if we called 911 it would take hours to if at all for them to dispatch an officer to us, which by then the problem was no longer there.

With the officers being able to do all of this, it helped recover numerous stolen vehicles, wanted criminals and we saw a community come together again. Kids feel safe to play outside, residents being comfortable calling 911 or non-emergency number to report issues and/or just willing to speak to officers regarding what they may have seen.

I can say are crime stats went from sky high prior to this program starting to dropping drastically.

Sincerely,

Tomisue Barela  
Senior Property Manager @ Craycroft Gardens  
[tomie@equilibriumprops.com](mailto:tomie@equilibriumprops.com)  
520-900-1567



## Project Team Members:

Sgt. Sean Travers  
Ofc. Vince Sullivan  
Ofc. Nicolo Solarino

## Project Contact Person

Sgt. Sean Travers  
Tucson Police Department  
1100 S. Alvernon  
Tucson, AZ 85711

[Sean.travers@tucsonaz.gov](mailto:Sean.travers@tucsonaz.gov)

520-589-8750