

Letter to the editor from Larry Rinehart, Bexley Chief of Police

Hardening the Target.

One sure way of determining the amount of crime in our community is by tracking the activity of our police department. In 2008 the Bexley police department received and responded to 13,665 calls for service; completed 835 criminal police reports and 227 traffic crash reports; made 474 physical arrests, logged 209,994 miles on police vehicles responding to calls for service and pro-actively patrolling neighborhoods, and we filed criminal charges against people whose identity was known to us 632 times. Your police department is working very hard to keep this 2.5 square mile city safe.

The most concerning of these statistics is the number of criminal charges filed. In all of 2007 the Bexley police department filed 413 charges against people for criminal activity in our city. That number increased by 219 in 2008. That is a concerning trend.

We need to harden the target by making it harder and less attractive for people to come to our city to commit their crime. The best way to do that is for us all to work together in monitoring our streets, alleys, front and back yards, and for us all to look out for each other.

We need to work together to form street, block, and neighborhood watches. I know, I know, you don't have time, don't want to be a nosey neighbor, and in some cases don't want to get to know your neighbors all that well. But I am telling you that the only way we can stem this tide of crime is to start looking out for each other and to organize community watches. It is much easier than it sounds. Please keep reading.

The way it works is that a group of residents, it doesn't need to be the entire street or block, just six or eight residents need to be willing to organize in order to keep an eye out in their community. Come up with a name for your group and talk your neighbors into gathering together in someone's house for a brief, initial meeting. If you give me a little advance notice I will come out and explain the process.

Once you have your neighbors gathered in your home, the police will explain how to become more vigilant in looking out for each other. You need to know each other's names and contact information. Then you select one trusted person to be the captain of your watch.

The watch captain will maintain a watch roster with everyone's name and phone number. The objective is to get to know each other well enough so that you know when something is out of place and suspicious. You will know when it is time to call the police. You become comfortable reminding each other to close your garage doors or to take bicycles in at night, etc.

The watch captain also organizes a few watch meetings each year via backyard, pot-luck, parties, etc. Whatever it takes to get everyone together two or three times a year to

remind them all that they are part of a watch and to update each other on new neighbors, etc. The police will come to these meetings and talk about crime in the neighborhood and ways to further harden the target. I plan to meet with block watch captains one night a month, especially during the summer months, to share information.

How cool is that? You can actually create and strengthen community bonds while fighting crime and making criminals very uncomfortable in your neighborhood. If you organize, select a captain, schedule a few gatherings a year, the city will tell you how to acquire one of those fancy block watch signs and we will put it in for you.

Please talk with your neighbors about it and if you can get a few interested send me an email to LRinehart@Bexley.org or call me at 559-4444. I am glad to come out and explain the benefits of working together to harden the target in this beautiful, unique, wonderful community. Thank you. Larry Rinehart