



MIDTOWN PONCE SECURITY ALLIANCE

Public Safety Report 03 / 2008

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ATTENDANCE AT SAFETY MEETING

We had around 20 people at the March safety meeting moderated by Peggy Denby, including several public officials. Because of personal commitments, we are a little late in putting out this information.

APD SPOTLIGHT: SGT. DB SCHIERBAUM

Sgt. Schierbaum was our special guest at the March safety meeting. He supervises both the burglary unit and the HOPE Team for APD zone 5.

The Atlanta Police Department hired Sgt. Schierbaum in 2002, and graduated him from its police academy in the spring of 2003 as valedictorian for his class. Initially APD assigned him as the beat officer for Midtown, an assignment he kept for the first several years. He was later promoted to the Zone 5 HOPE Team (Homeless Outreach and Panhandling Enforcement).

In 2007 he was transferred to Zone 6 and worked extensively with the various neighborhood groups over there. He was very popular among the Virginia Highland folks. In 2008 he came home to our zone when he was promoted to supervisor of the burglary unit and the HOPE team. Sgt. Schierbaum's role is very important to us because of the high volume of street people, and especially the problems they bring us. His role will help us and our patrol

in street people management.

Prior to becoming one of Atlanta's finest, he already had 9 years of law enforcement experience in Johnson County, Illinois. He served that agency as a communications supervisor and as a public information officer.

Street people

The HOPE Team (Homeless Outreach and Panhandling Enforcement) focuses on getting mentally ill street people off the streets of Atlanta by applying a wide range of options besides jail. They will lock up someone if they break the law, but they work to intervene before it comes to that point. The HOPE Team refers many individuals to social services and maintains good contact with various agencies.

The HOPE Team works to break the cycles of street life - drug use, encampments, panhandling, etc. Eradicating encampments is a crucial strategy in breaking these cycles because they do much to perpetuate other problems associated with vagrancy. Chronic homelessness is a very difficult problem to deal with because many are deeply entrenched into these patterns after years of substance abuse issues. Crisis intervention and de-escalation skills frequently come into play.

Burglaries

Sgt. Schierbaum spoke extensively with safety meeting attendees about burglaries. He noted that juvenile offenders comprise most of our burglary suspects, though suspects of other profiles still come into play (professional and especially what Midtowners know as “crackhead burglars”).

APD deploys a number of strategies to address burglaries in our area. Burglary officers patrol the area in plain clothes and unmarked cars. They keep a list of known burglars and monitor their jail status. With the help of the repeat offender officer they work to revoke their probation when they reoffend. The Atlanta Police Department also has a pawn shop unit that looks for stolen property.

Curious neighbors are the most effective strategy in burglary prevention and prosecution. The police cannot be everywhere at one time, and residents on a given block and in a given neighborhood know who fits in with neighborhood demographics.

Sgt. Schierbaum outlined three things that we can do to deter burglaries and enhance recovery of stolen property:

Shrubbery - shrubbery should not block view of the the house and especially the windows and doors. While hedges provide privacy to the residents of the home, burglars also take advantage of this form of concealment.

Alarm systems - it goes without saying that a remotely monitored alarm system helps to deter.

Inventory - Documenting household possessions will greatly assist in recovery should you become victims of a burglary. Serial numbers should be recorded, identifiers should be etched in to items without serial numbers, and jewelry should be photographed. This documentation should be kept in a safe place such as a safe deposit box or some other off-site location.

COURT WATCH TRAINING

Earlier this month the Fulton County DA’s Office conducted a city-wide court watch training. This is a wonderful program because it empowers the community to take an active role in shaping the public safety picture. As District Attorney Paul Howard opened up, crime is not acceptable and the court watch program is one more way to counter the attitude that crime is “normal” in our neighborhoods.

Prosecutors and police have come to recognize that they cannot do the job alone. The community must play an active role, especially in a neighborhood like ours. Petty criminals, such as the pair of transvestitutes chronically working near Piedmont and

4th, should not be allowed to play a major role in the atmosphere of our neighborhood. As we often say, we have fixed up the house and done the yard, but we also have to work on the neighborhood too.

Residents in a given community must also show determination to get chronic offenders out of our neighborhood. It is not enough to merely pay for a patrol and let the officers and MPSA deal with the rest - we need neighbors willing to appear in court. This often happens at very short notice, and the more volunteers we have to draw from, the better.

Among the roles of the MPSA is to assist the Fulton DA with this effort. Judges generally respond well when the community is represented in a case. This gives us the opportunity to make it known how a given offender negatively affects a neighborhood like ours, and special measures can be included in the sentence to better protect the community. In most cases the judge only knows someone is being charged

Peggy Denby presented how we handle court watch cases. When we find out about a chronic or major offender, we compile our own rap sheet on the individual. This information consists of data from public records (especially Department of Corrections and the Fulton County jail), “intel” from residents, and our street surveillance catalog.

Peggy highlighted two particular Midtown court watch cases. Ricky Love, who would spontaneously attacked people, was finally kept in jail awaiting a psychiatric evaluation after a 2006 attack. This year will mark two years that he has been kept off of the streets of Midtown, and we expect an eventual conviction or permanent placement into a forensic hospital. Had the community not been attentive, Ricky Love would likely have gotten out of jail quickly and attacked someone else by now.

Also in 2006 Jermaine Moss went on a car break-in spree in Midtown. Luckily for us he drove a very distinct car, and was captured on a video surveillance camera. We put out an alert, and within three days we were alerted to his presence in the neighborhood. He was quickly taken down by the Atlanta Police and Midtown Blue. Because community participation in the prosecution process played a major role, the defendant plea bargained in order not to have the neighborhood influence the sentence (he only got 18 months).

Most of our court watch cases are with the Fulton County DA’s Office for state-level felonies. But misdemeanors and city ordinance violations come into play. Just this past December, a chronic prostitute was arrested after spitting and throwing rocks at the MPSA patrol vehicle. Several Midtowners showed up for the court hearing, and while the defendant only got a light sentence (which otherwise would have been resolved with “time served”), this particular individual seems to understand that messing with Midtown is not such a good idea. Several residents plan to show up on the 28th for the case involving the problem property at 9th and Argonne.

In order to keep this working well, we need all the volunteers we can get. We maintain a network of residents willing to go to court on short notice. Most volunteers cannot make it to every single case, but the more we have to draw from, the more

effectively we can respond to court watch cases. Sometimes we have only a few hours notice to mobilize a neighborhood response to a given case. So please, if you can help us with this, let us know.

We also highly recommend court watch training next time they hold it.

You can also see our current court and parole watch list at ----- (URL TBA)

UPDATE ON LAST WEEK'S ALERT

Kenneth Lamb (“barefoot panhandler”) remains in the Fulton County Jail awaiting charges for failing to register as a sex offender. He was charged some time ago with this offense, and failed to appear in court. A bench warrant was put out early in 2007, and reactivated when we put our alert last week. The sex offender law passed last year comes in handy for neighborhood security because if he is convicted, he faces no less than 10, and not more than 20 years imprisonment, for failing to comply with sex offender restrictions.

John Spurling, the individual charged with theft from motor vehicles, was released from jail. The judge issued an order of dismissal, meaning that the charges have been dropped. He was more of an issue for the Virginia Highland, Inman Park, and Edgewood areas than for us, but this car was also seen in the MPSA service area too.

CHRONIC OFFENDERS - “Midtown’s Most Unwanted”

We have two particular individuals - transvestite prostitutes - that we wish to target aggressively. These are currently our most unwanted prostitutes in our area, and we are determined to eradicate their presence in our neighborhood.

We are requesting that all prosecutors put a flag on these individuals, as these would be a high priority court case for us. Residents should be especially attentive to the presence of these individuals, and report any unlawful activity to the authorities. You can view their dossiers at www.midtownponce.org/news/unwanted.

We need as much insight on these individuals as we can get. Also, if you are aware of them getting arrested, please notify us ASAP, as we often do not have enough time to mobilize a response to their arrest. In the near future we will identify a few more for the unwanted list.

- www.midtownponce.org/news/unwanted

MPSA MAILBAG

Mail theft on Vedado around 1:30pm on March 20th - I was at my window and saw a fellow coming up Vedado (heading south, on the bend) with a big package under his arm, looking back continually. I went out front and intercepted him as he walked by and asked where he was going with the package. He mumbled something about work and kept going, rounded the corner onto Charles Allen towards Ponce. When I followed up the sidewalk a bit, he had already ditched the package at Charles Allen & 4th and fled south.

I called 911 and then MPSA. Sgt. Cooper came by but, of course, our thief was long gone. The package was an outgoing FedEx, still unopened, taken from just up the block on Vedado near Greenwood. I was happy to have rescued the package but wish we had gotten the guy! Too many of my own things have gone missing. Anyway, here's a description if you'd like to circulate it: Black male, very dark complexion, shaved head, wearing dark blue top and dark blue or black pants, carrying an olive green colored pullover. Average to tall, average build, perhaps on the muscular side.

Car burglar apprehended #1 - *This morning about 8AM, as I was walking the dogs, I was approached by a man who said he had just been robbed. He asked if I had seen a tall black man with a black coat. He and his girlfriend were sleeping in their apartment on the west side of Myrtle, at Ninth, when a man entered, grabbed the girlfriend's purse and ran. He called the police right away.*

30 minutes later Atlanta police caught the thief in the alley between Myrtle and Piedmont.

The police told me that the girl, recently moved into the neighborhood, had left her apartment door open and that the thief had just pushed open the door and took the purse.

Two lessons here - 1) don't leave your doors unlocked and open, and 2) call the police whenever anything happens or you even SUSPECT something is going on.

I repeat - call the police immediately if you see something, suspect something, or see one of the characters periodically noted by blockwatch or MPSA. In this case the guy's immediate call to the police brought them and they were able to catch the guy nearby.

#2 on same incident - *We helped APD catch a burglar/prowler this morning and want to commend the two officers above [McFarland and Bowers]. We were walking along 900 block of Piedmont when we saw a black guy running through the vacant lot toward the sidewalk, with a white guy in pursuit and on the phone. We watched where the burglar went between buildings and stood on the sidewalk keeping any eye on his movements while waiting for APD. About 5 min later, 3 or 4 cop cars arrived, Officer McFarland stopped by us we quickly showed him where the b/g had run, in 60 seconds he got a call that the b/g had been apprehended at 8th/Piedmont by Officers Bowers.*

We went up, identified him and gave info. Came back to the scene gave info and they found the bag the b/g had been carrying as he ran. We were very impressed with the speed of the cops and how they handled the whole situation. It was a beautiful sight!

When we got home, there was a suitcase spilled open in the yard at the Dakota. Trying to find the owner of that now! Obviously stolen and ransacked.

STAY SAFE! Please encourage your fellow Midtowners to join the MPSA!

- Your Neighbors at the Midtown Ponce Security Alliance