



MIDTOWN PONCE SECURITY ALLIANCE

Public Safety Report 09 / 2008

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SEPTEMBER SAFETY MEETING

Some 45 people attended the September safety meeting moderated by Peggy Denby. Among them were the following:

- **Lt. McGee** of the Midtown Mini-Precinct
- **Sgt. Norman**, director of the APD HOPE Team, who spoke at length about APD's response to the street people problem along with general law enforcement issues
- **Officer Nelms**, the Quality of Life officer for APD Zone 5
- **Sgt. Cooper**, coordinator for the MPSA Patrol
- **Lt. Easterling** of MARTA Police
- **Wanda Dallas**, candidate for judge in Fulton County Superior Court Election
- **Jackson Bedford**, candidate for re-election Fulton County State Court

In addition to what we reported below in the HOPE Team and Mini-Precinct articles, there was extensive discussion on the disorderly conduct ordinance. We will cover that in detail in an upcoming Eye on Midtown.

APD HOPE TEAM

The Regional Commission on Homelessness commissioned a comprehensive blueprint to address the massive homeless issue in Atlanta.

This blueprint not only spawned the Gateway Center as the centerpiece of the plan, but also the HOPE Team to deal with law enforcement aspects of the issue. Atlanta Police modeled the HOPE Team after the Crisis Intervention Team used by the Memphis Police to deal with the street people having run-ins with the law.

HOPE Team officers are trained in a wide range of intervention techniques, such as de-escalation techniques, and how to identify mentally ill individuals who might be receptive to special services. These skills help the HOPE Team assess a realistic and workable alternative to simply locking these individuals up in many cases. The HOPE Team works directly with the Atlanta Gateway Center, which in turn triages individuals into appropriate partnering social service providers to help get them off of the streets and onward to a more productive life.

Traditional policing – simply locking up offenders – does not always generate the best outcome even though it is the most practical. In their experience, they find that mental illness drives much of the street people activity and the ensuing crime and disorder in Atlanta. Therefore social services need to play a major role in the longer run. In many cases (though not all), social services have proven more effective than traditional police procedures of simply locking up. It is still standard procedure to check these individuals for active warrants, possession of stolen goods, etc. but beyond that, their focus is screening for social services. Those not responsive to opportunities for the help they are need are handled with traditional law enforcement procedures.

In the safety meeting, it was pointed out that that many of the street people actually do not mind going on a jail vacation because it provides a free meal and a shower. Because of the lax sentencing practices in Atlanta and Fulton County, they know they will be right back out of their jail vacation in short order. Atlanta has traditionally been more tolerant of street people than other places, and the situation has come to a head as a result. Initiatives such as the HOPE Team, with the help of the Gateway Center, will hopefully reverse this trend.

The HOPE Team can be reached directly at 404-658-6445.

GENERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

Lt. McGee reported the activity during the month of August: 46 arrests, 62 roadblocks, 649 calls for service via 911, and 830 drop-ins and directed patrols (directed patrols are requests to check specific places at certain times). These numbers are in addition to regular police coverage.

Vice details continue – one detail netted 7 prostitution arrests on Cypress Street. Midtown Blue has developed a leaflet urging people not to leave valuables in their cars, and the Midtown Mini-Precinct assists with the dissemination. APD is seeing very high levels of car break-ins particularly in parking garages in the Peachtree corridor. According to Lt. McGee, the victim in the recent homicide had drawn a stun-gun before he was shot. IN response to a question, McGee pointed out that it is not common to find guns among panhandlers.

Officer Nelms from the Quality of Life unit was also present at the meetings. We will work with him to address problem properties in the area. The burned-out apartment building at 9th and Argonne remains at the top of the list. In April the owners were ordered in housing court to board up the place to halt the vagrant traffic for the time being, and then bring the property into full compliance within six months. That puts the deadline at the end of October, and nothing has happened since that round of court hearings, so we are anticipating some more court watch dates. The former Midtown Manor property remains a nuisance, as with a couple of properties on Penn Avenue. Please alert us to other properties in need of review...

The Quality of Life unit can be reached at 404-658-6445 (same number as the HOPE Team).

MPSA PATROL REPORT

In the month leading up to the September safety meeting, the MPSA Patrol handled 16 911-calls, made 23 arrests, and responded to 10 calls for service made directly by MPSA members. Some of the highlights from the patrol logs:

- 8/12 - Sgt. Cooper assisted in the apprehension of the burglary trio (previously reported by MPSA)
- 8/12 – arrest of prostitute in the residential area
- 8/13 – Patrol addressed a noise complaint
- 8/14 – Assisted Zone 5 in locating a burglary suspect frequenting the Ponce & Boulevard drug scene. No known charges came out of this search, but this individual has an extensive criminal record of offenses ranging from shoplifting to burglary.
- 8/14 – a prostitute arrested for violation of pedestrian duties
- 8/20 – two prostitutes arrested for pedestrian duties (separate incidents)
- 8/20 – subject arrested for urinating in roadway.
- 8/21 – prostitute arrested for pedestrian in roadway
- 8/22 – Patrol responded to report of suspicious person creeping through the neighborhood. Subject was arrested for suspended driver license.
- 8/24 – arrest (entry illegible).
- 8/26 – Patrol assisted bounty hunters locate a wanted felon. The subject was previously incarcerated for robbery and kidnapping.
- 8/27 – arrest for drinking in public

- 8/28 – subject arrested for burglary in 800 block of Myrtle (charge later downgraded to criminal trespass).
- 8/29 – Subject arrested for public drunkenness. The subject has been previously incarcerated for theft, breaking into cars, and credit card fraud.
- 8/29 – subject arrested for drinking in public
- 9/03 – prostitute arrested for violation of pedestrian in roadway
- 9/04 – subject arrested for consuming alcohol too close to package store
- 9/04 – Assisted APD with shooting at Atlantic station (in serious situations even off-duty officers must break away from their extra jobs and assist on-duty police).
- 9/05 – subject arrest on warrant
- 9/05 – chronic prostitute arrested for pedestrian violations. This is the same subject servicing the Jesus guy at St. Charles & Lakeview previously reported by MPSA. Further investigation on this individual reveals numerous arrests in Dekalb and Fulton Counties.
- 9/07 – subject arrested for drinking in public
- 9/07 – prostitute arrested for disorderly conduct and obstruction
- 9/08 – prostitute arrested

Except for occasional surges, residents have observed much fewer prostitutes in the area. The ones that venture into the neighborhood are put under heavy surveillance and immediately arrested for the slightest infraction. A warrant remains in effect for Steven Green, and we will push for the stiffest punishment possible in hopes that he will serve as an example to the other prostitutes for their highly unwelcome presence in our neighborhood.

The patrol continues to clean up vagrant campsites. Wachovia has sold the property, so the letter of agency is no longer in effect. We have not made contact with the new owners, but Sgt. Cooper tells us that they are keeping the property clean.

RICKY LOVE

At long last we can put the Ricky Love case behind us. His final plea hearing and sentencing took place Monday, just over two years after his last arrest for brutally beating a woman on Peachtree Street. Several court watch volunteers attended this high-priority hearing, including the victim herself.

Judge Schwall sentenced Ricky Love to 10 years, of which two years to be served, and the remaining 8 years to be served on probation. He was credited with the two years for the time already served awaiting trial, meaning he is now on the probation part of his sentence. The defendant must reside in a halfway house in Columbus, where mental health treatment will be provided, and can live in the halfway house indefinitely. He is banished from Fulton County for the next eight years, meaning that we can reasonably conclude that we are out of the woods with the specter of another attack by him.

If Ricky Love returns to Fulton County during the 8 year period, Judge Schwall, who has presided over the case since the very beginning, promised prompt action, which would likely entail incarceration.

Over the next eight years there will be periodic hearings to assess his case. The next hearing has been scheduled for December 8th of this year. We do not anticipate the necessity for us to attend these hearings as long as we receive no reports of sightings in our area.

- **MPSA profile sheet:** <http://www.midtownponce.org/news/profile006.pdf>

TYWONG McCOY

Tywong McCoy had a court date this week. He is the subject that exposes himself to women in the neighborhood, and faces stalking charges because of it. He has remained in jail ever since his arrest. When it became clear that the Judge was going to sentence him to a substantial

amount of time, McCoy withdrew his guilty plea and asked to go to trial. We believe that the presence of court watch volunteers had some impact on his decision to withdraw his plea. A trial date not been set, but we will need court watch volunteers at that time. If you wish to be on the court watch list in case you are available that day, please let us know.

LOCAL ELECTION CANDIDATES

We have invited all the candidates for this year's races for Fulton Judges and Sheriff. We invited them as a service for the Midtown community to hear their views on how to address public safety issues. We do not endorse candidates. Since they more or less reiterated information on their website, we are providing the links for the two who presented their platform at the September safety meeting.

Wanda Dallas (for Fulton State Court Judge)

- www.dallasforjudge.com

Jackson Bedford (for Fulton Superior Court):

- www.judgebedford.com

FINAL UPDATE ON WHOLE FOODS SITUATION

While Whole Foods told the many residents that they officially cancelled the fundraising event, they have confirmed that they will give \$3500 to the Earn-a-bike program. Our research and feedback from our contacts with the Gateway Center assured us that this program, in itself, poses no concern for us. We hope that all of donation will actually go directly to the Earn-a-Bike program, and not one cent will be handled, let alone kept, by the Metro Task Force that has wrought havoc on the surrounding community for many years.

We were alerted to the 5% day benefit after it was already in progress. We immediately checked the Whole Foods website, and found an announcement on their event calendar specifically naming the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless as the beneficiary, and no mention of the Earn-a-Bike program. A phone call to the store further confirmed that the event was for the Task Force. Anything billed as a benefit for the Metro Task Force, colloquially known as Peachtree Pine, causes great alarm in Midtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

Peachtree Pine has shamelessly and persistently abused the surrounding residential and business community for many years. Because of their practices, their presence perpetuates the conditions enabling the way of life for a great many street criminals. Day and night drug dealers ply their trade just outside their facility. Many neighborhood groups have bent over backwards for many years to try and work with Peachtree Pine, to no avail. We find it critical that Whole Foods understands the dire seriousness of being connected to Peachtree Pine, a wolf in sheep's clothing, and we hope that we have achieved this objective.

Any Whole Foods Market benefit for the truly needy and deserving will generate much appreciation in the Midtown community so long as the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless does not in any way benefit from such activity. Whole Foods enjoys a good reputation in the community for their choices of their generous benefit recipients, and we believe this will remain their ongoing practice.

TWO APPROACHES TO THE STREET PEOPLE ISSUE IN ATLANTA

It is important to understand the fundamental differences between the two mutually-exclusive approaches to address the street people problem in Atlanta.

The first approach is that of the Atlanta Gateway Center, spawned by a comprehensive blueprint by the Regional Commission on Homelessness "to end homelessness in Atlanta in 10 Years." This blueprint calls for a number of strategies to address the complex aspects of the street people

issue in the Atlanta area, including law enforcement issues, mental illness, substance abuse, supportive housing, and employment.

The Gateway Center serves as the centerpiece of this comprehensive blueprint. This facility, located near the Garnett Street MARTA station, works as an initial intake center, and then steers the population they serve into appropriate partnering agencies to address the issues contributing significantly to an individual's life on the streets. This program, in letter and spirit, works to move people away from a life on the streets, often punctuated by criminal and nuisance activity, through treatment programs and onward to a more productive and meaningful existence.

At the other end of the spectrum we have the Peachtree Pine shelter with virtually no substance to their claims of working to end "homelessness." In a nutshell, anyone can check into Peachtree Pine - almost no questions asked. They simply point out the bed for the night, the TV room downstairs, and the bulletin board listing free meal programs. And on this bulletin board there is likely a listing of treatment services - when the recipient of their services gets around to it.

Rather than seeking the treatment they need, they look out the window of the Peachtree Pine dormitory and see the abundant availability of street drugs across the street. So they panhandle and commit petty crimes to procure drugs. This goes unnoticed by the staff running Peachtree Pine because their little world stops at the walls and property line of that building (except when they go on their notorious feet-stamping crusades by the vanload to city council and neighborhood meetings).

While Peachtree Pine is the most problematic "homeless" agency in Atlanta, they are not the only ones with tired old failed strategies. Many area churches and agencies also serve the street people with mere handouts. Some do it in their own facilities where their volunteers simply set up, serve whoever may come, mop up, and go home. Other groups - especially from suburban places - simply drive in, hand out, and drive off. These groups invariably operate with either a lack of a realistic understanding or lack of acknowledgement of the larger picture of street people. They fail to incorporate the complex issues in the daily routine of the typical street person - the daily cycle of panhandling, drugs, petty crime, and partaking free meals and other handouts and finally crashing out at a shelter or behind a business somewhere.

Peachtree Pine has demonstrated to us and especially to the surrounding community only the ability to warehouse Atlanta's street people without any expectation to move toward self-sufficiency, or any consideration to the impact generated on nearby neighborhoods. The Atlanta Gateway Center has convinced us and especially to the community of its firm commitment to address the specific issues contributing to life on the streets. Those wishing to contribute meaningfully have a moral and ethical obligation to work within the framework of the Gateway Center. The Gateway Center framework benefits not only the community, but especially the recipients of those served by it.

Weblinks:

- The Atlanta Gateway Center: www.gatewayctr.org

MPSA MAILBAG

Grady students intimidating pedestrians - *Just figured I'd pass this along as a warning: yesterday evening about 8:30 pm I was walking by Grady High School on 8th street on my way to the grocery store and passed through a group of students waiting for the bus. One group of students came up behind me and hit me in the head. There was no provocation on my part - I was just passing by minding my own business. They then surrounded me and put up a macho front, as if they wanted to fight. I used some strong language and made to call the police and they ran off down Monroe. Some of the other students who weren't involved voiced some concern*

about my well being and in the end it wasn't a big deal, just some kids fooling around, but it would be wise to be extra careful around Grady High School. **MPSA NOTE:** a faculty member at Grady responded as follows: *I sent it to the assistant principal, David Propst, who oversees discipline. I am disgusted by this, just disgusted and I am going to make sure the message goes out at Grady that we need to respect our community.*

Lack of jail space - A Fulton County prosecutor told me that if the arrestee is homeless, the charges are dead docketed, suspect released on his own recognizance, etc, on these property crimes. Since there is no way to send them a subpoena to go to court, they are simply released. I asked this person why it wasn't incumbent on the accused to find out when their court date was by contacting the jail or court. No real good answer for that. This is the same scenarios with Ken Lamb and so many others. As most of you know, property crimes, car break-ins and burglaries, are the crimes driving the crime stats in every zone. It is a quality of life issue that Fulton County is unable to deal with because of the size of the jail. As long as there is a cap of 2250 inmates, they WILL allow this process to continue. They have no other choice.

I think Judge Marvin Shoob is holding the wrong person in contempt of court. It shouldn't be Sheriff Freeman – The Fulton County Commission needs to be scrutinized because they are the ones that control the purse strings. They control the pay rate of the deputies and it is no wonder they cannot keep enough of them hired. They control the issuance of bonds. Recently, Commissioner Rob Pitts announced he wanted to renovate the public libraries with a \$250+M bond referendum. The county commissioners are out of touch with the desires of the community they represent.

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

- Your Neighbors at the Midtown Ponce Security Alliance

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