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SAN BERNARDINO: Strengthening community to reduce crime

Activists hope outdoor movie will create bonds among neighbors in high-crime area. Effort is part of grant program that also involves more police bike patrols.

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BY BRIAN ROKOS / STAFF WRITER
Published: Nov. 17, 2014 Updated: 5:46 p.m.



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, BRIAN ROKOS, STAFF

COMMUNITY GATHERING

What: A free outdoor screening of "Polar Express," plus free food, a raffle and information booths

When: 6:30 p.m. Dec. 30

Where: CLUES Charter School, 1671 N. Sierra Way, San Bernardino

Information and movie tickets: Lashea West, Institute for Public Strategies, 909-266-1660, ext. 151, or lwest@publicstrategies.org

ORGANIZATION'S GOALS

The Institute for Public Strategies is working with the city of San Bernardino, merchants and residents to reduce crime. Its strategies include:

Reducing the number of abandoned homes.

Working with the city's Crime Intervention Partnership

Deanne Truax Godinez once lived on a rural road in upstate New York where neighbors knew and watched

out for each other.

increasing theft, graffiti and gang activity. And neighbors who were strangers to each other.

"I heard that 70 percent of Americans don't know their neighbors, and I think that's real sad," said Truax Godinez, who decided to do something about it.

So Sunday, Nov. 16, with San Bernardino Police Department bicycle officers in the background, Truax Godinez and other community activists went door to door inviting families to a free outdoor movie with the hope that they will become acquainted and help each other by calling police when they see crime being committed.

"I don't want my neighborhood to go down the tubes," said Truax Godinez, 53. "We can make change happen as a group. We have to start with baby steps, but I want to run."

Sunday's effort was part of an initiative called the Byrne Project. It involves San Bernardino police, Truax Godinez's Taking Back Our Neighborhoods Neighborhood Improvement Group and San Diego County-based Institute for Public Strategies, which tries

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program.

Promoting the city's Crime-Free Multi-Housing program.

Working with residents and businesses to clean up and beautify their neighborhoods and develop a sense of ownership.

Connecting residents to their neighbors and the resources to address immediate needs.

to improve public safety by addressing issues that lead to crime.

The goal is to reduce crime in a north-central area of San Bernardino bordered by Sierra Avenue on the west, Waterman Avenue on the east, 16th Street on the north and Base Line on the south. The federally funded project is named for Edward Byrne, a New York City police officer who was shot to death in 1988 as he sat in his patrol car while guarding a witness in a drug case.

COMMUNITY POLICING

The grant allowed San Bernardino police to purchase four new bicycles to upgrade its fleet for the five-officer team. Officers patrol the Byrne area five to 10 hours per week, Sgt. Shauna Gates said. Those officers, freed from their easily spotted patrol cars, find less resistance when they approach residents to ask about problems in their neighborhood, she said.

“We’re trying to bridge that gap between the police and the community,” Gates said. “It’s a little easier on bikes because it’s less intimidating.”

The bike patrols are just one of the many community policing initiatives San Bernardino police are undertaking to build relationships with residents and merchants.

Those include Coffee with a Cop, the citizens policing academy, citizen volunteer program, neighborhood associations, canned food drives, Shop with a Cop and reading to schoolchildren.

“Community policing remains our top effort. We cannot police this city without the community’s help,” Lt. Rich Lawhead said in a phone interview. “Hopefully we’re building some partnerships that will help solve some of the imbedded crime in the community.”

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NUEVO: Fire leaves 5 homeless

Truax Godinez, Lashea West of the Institute for Public Strategies and two others canvassed the length of Sepulveda within the project area Sunday. The street has a mix of apartments and houses. Some yards are well kept and others are overgrown. Children played in a couple of yards and could be heard playing inside at other residences. Many houses have security bars on their windows.

In less than two hours, residents had signed up to receive 125 tickets to watch “Polar Express” Dec. 30 at CLUES Charter School. The event will include free food, a raffle and information booths.

“A couple of them said, ‘I’m so glad you are doing that,’” West said.

Among those they visited was Annie Hunsaker, who was out sweeping leaves that had been deposited on her driveway by stiff overnight winds. She requested several movie tickets.

“I think it’s a good idea for the neighborhood to get together and take their kids and watch the movie. I’m hoping for a great outcome from people meeting each other,” said Hunsaker, who said she has lived on Sepulveda for two years.

The volunteers plan to hit more streets in the days leading up to the movie.

Contact the writer: brokos@pe.com or 951-368-9569



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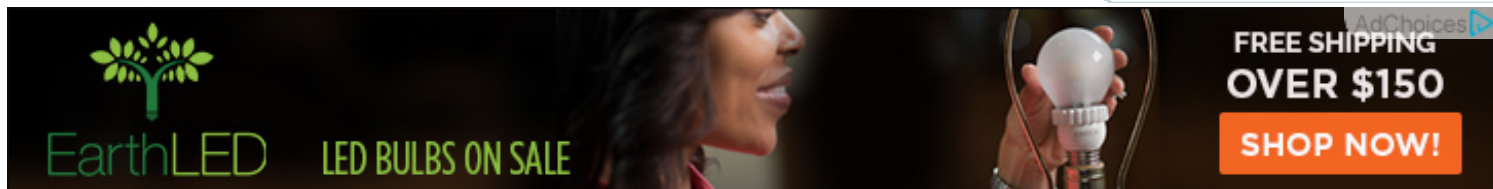
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