

JSO officers stay busy protecting property and lives



From the Sheriff's Desk

Sheriff
John
Rutherford

I want to update you on a few JSO initiatives and what has been happening in the past several weeks. I often make the point that, as one of the nation's largest cities, we must have a Sheriff's Office that is not a single-issue agency – we do many things, we do them very well and we have to do them all at the same time.

First, we certified three apartment communities in our Crime-Free program. Eureka Gardens on the Westside, Plantation Apartments on the Southside, and Paradise Island on Southside Boulevard have been the first to earn the Crime-Free designation in our city.

What does this mean? Let me give you a brief background:

In late 2006, I asked our patrol commanders to take a look at the growing property crime, particularly in Zone 3 where a lot of new apartment construction was taking place. Our crime analysts told us that, city-wide, 17 percent of Jacksonville families lived in multi-family communities, yet those locations accounted for 40 percent of reported violent crime.

Our team searched "best practices" and found the Crime-Free Multi-Housing program in Mesa, Arizona. We launched it here in April 2007, and those apartments that join us agree to these stipulations:

- Managers go through

extensive training with the Sheriff's Office, agreeing to track crime and criminals on the property.

- They work with tenants, having them sign a Crime-Free Addendum to their leases, pledging that they will not allow criminal activity in their unit.

- Residents face eviction if they are involved in criminal activity anywhere on the property, in addition to regular enforcement action.

- The apartment community will not rent to anyone who has been evicted for crimes by another community.

- The community agrees to make all the modifications and upgrades recommended by a JSO Crime Prevention thorough Environmental Design study, and finally,

- A tenant gathering is held to continue to build relationships between management, residents and the police.

In cities where the program exists, participation is outstanding, and the CRIME FREE sign on the property has made those apartment communities some of the most desired locations in the respective city. If you are planning on moving into an apartment, be sure and ask if they are a part of JSO's CRIME FREE MULTI-HOUSING program!

Next, I want to tell you that our Economic Crime Unit (ECU) announced some arrests after working closely with the state's Department of Business and Professional Regulation, targeting unscrupulous, unlicensed contractors. They began by reading

advertisements and checking them out. The ECU found that more than half of the advertisers did not have licenses. Then they called and invited the advertisers to come to a decoy house and provide a bid for work. Some came back to actually start work by collecting a pre-payment. This is something regulators remind you NOT TO DO.

Some were cited for the illegal ads, and 16 others were arrested for unlicensed contracting. All were issued Cease and Desist Orders. Four were taken to jail because of other charges, such as drugs, or failures to appear in court on prior arrests. This all began because of consumer complaints and, because it was so successful, we plan to run the "sting" again.

I was told of one elderly couple, with a home completely paid for, who hired an unlicensed contractor who did very shoddy work and didn't finish. It cost them well over \$200,000 to get the work re-done by a licensed professional, and that forced them to take out a mortgage to pay for it.

Finally, a brief update on the OPERATION SAFE STREETS overtime officers on patrol and the impact of their

work on the streets.

Since starting back up on February 1 of this year, we have seen:

- a 41% reduction in gun crimes from January to February of 2008,

- a 22% reduction in gun crimes when comparing February 07 to 08, and

- we made 17 firearm-related arrests and removed 26 firearms from the streets during the month of February.

This is clear testament to the impact of additional manpower as we work to increase citizen-police partnerships and make our streets safer for everyone.

For more information on these activities and other JSO News, please visit our website at coj.net/jso.

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