

Village residents are essential element of crime reduction team

**By MAYOR EUGENE P. FLINN, JR.
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The community has worked hard for incorporation with several important purposes, themes that the council has continued to focus on: Police, Parks and Public Works. We have worked hard on creating a responsive police unit in Palmetto Bay. It's hard now to remember back four years, before incorporation, to what it was like then, but it wasn't a 42 member unit dedicated to our defined boundaries. Back then, it was what the County felt we should have, and that may have been a dozen police officers covering a large geographic area that incidentally included Palmetto Bay.

Now we generally get 911 response in less than 3 minutes. We have saved a few lives and caught crooks in the act, and we have a guaranteed police presence post hurricanes to patrol neighborhoods without power. It has been a very positive story.

Yet crime still does happen, and everyone on the Council is acutely aware that statistics don't matter much if you are a victim. There is always room to do better. I am proud to say that the community expectations continue to rise, and that the greater police response has triggered the heightened expectations.

Teamwork is a key. One of the most important initiatives is to get our 25,000 residents to be the eyes and ears of the police unit. No matter how many police we have, they can't be everywhere. It is far too often that crimes are not reported unless police reports are needed to collect on insurance. All of us need to report

every crime, even malicious mischief, and to call the police at any sign of something suspicious.

It may seem trivial to you, sometimes not worth bothering the police, but it could be part of a pattern, and your call could be the final puzzle piece that helps solve a crime, or prevents one.

If you've been following the news (and you can sign up for my e-mail newsletter by writing to me at eugeneflinn@aol.com), you know there have been several scary reports of near-abduction in and around the village recently. If you see a stranger loitering, a car parked on your street that doesn't seem to belong, call 305-4-POLICE (until we get a better Palmetto Bay number) and report it!

That boat going out of a neighbor's driveway in the middle of the day on a weekday just might be a theft in progress. If you find it suspicious, make the call. The police would rather investigate 10 false leads than miss one important one.

We had a case recently of a man ringing doorbells in the village, asking for money. Finding this strange, panhandling door to door, several residents called the police, who took the man into custody. It turns out he has a long record of armed robbery, and probably was doing more in his door-to-door canvass than just looking for a small handout. Who knows how it might have ended up if all those residents just treated it as a minor annoyance and did not call the police.

There also has been a campaign by our police to get residents to better protect themselves by keeping garage doors closed. They have been ringing doorbells, asking people to close their garage doors. In one case, they found the garage door open, and no one answered the bell. They found the door from the garage to the

house also was unlocked, and they were able to walk right in! Nobody was home. The police can't protect us unless we take steps to protect ourselves!

What is an emergency? When do you call 911, and when do you call 305-4-POLICE? If it's a situation where immediate police response could make a difference, call 911.

An example: someone noticed their purse stolen from a cabinet in their office. They knew it must have happened within the past 5 minutes. That's a 911 call, where the crook might still be in the building or the immediate neighborhood, and there's a chance that fast police response could lead to an arrest. But if the purse could have been stolen anytime within the past 4 or 5 hours, that's 305-4-POLICE. It's a judgment call, so use your judgment.

Our police are eager to attend meetings and provide safety tips to children and adults. This can be done at neighborhood gatherings or at school, camp, scout, or athletic group meetings. If your PTA or club wants a speaker, the police will be happy to provide one. Even if you want to gather a group of neighbors at your home, the police will attend your group and provide up to date information on keeping yourself and your home safe.

And you certainly should become part of our new Citizen Crime Watch program.

All of us on the Council get frustrated when residents tell us of complaints they have never reported to the police. Sometimes it's months later, far beyond the point where the information might have been useful to the police. Tell the police immediately!

Even eggings, graffiti, and mail box bashing should be timely reported. This allows police to heighten area watches and put a stop to it before the incidents increase in severity or frequency.

Community involvement is important. There is no better example of community support in action than back in October 2002, when this community responded to the horrible rape that occurred at a local day care. It was this community, no one person, not the police department alone, that flushed a violent and sick individual out of (or actually into) hiding and brought the pressure to bear that ultimately led to the police capturing him. It was a proud moment for this community in that this was the suspect's alleged fifth similar offense, but this community made sure that it will be the last time he will have the capacity to strike – justice system willing. We cannot say that the string of crimes would have ended in October 2002 had the public been disinterested and unengaged.

We have built a police unit that cares about community involvement, and we have given our police some terrific tools to fight crime. But it's up to all of us to make sure they have a chance to use them. Being a safer community requires a team effort! It doesn't require much time, but with all of us engaged, we can take our progress (and expectations) to an even higher level.