

The Kentlands Citizens Assembly

How One Community is Taking Back the Night

By Robin Manougian

A large crowd filled the gymnasium of the Rachel Carson Elementary School to capacity in January, a sure sign that the Kentlands, Lakelands, and Quince Orchard Park communities in Gaithersburg, Maryland, had had enough. By January 11, 2004, Gaithersburg Police had logged 67 incidents of vandalism dating back to October 5, 2003, involving damage to some 50 resident's vehicles, ranging from well-thrown eggs, to rocks, bricks, and air-gun pellets. According to city officials, damage to vehicles is estimated at more than \$10,000.

The seriousness of the matter was obvious by those in attendance, among them Gaithersburg Mayor Sidney Katz, Gaithersburg City Chief of Police Mary Ann Viverette, Detective Pat Word and Sgt. Scott Scarff, both of whom lead the vandalism investigation, County Councilman Mike Subin, City Councilman Stan Alster, and City Manager David B. Humpton. Each spoke of the crimes, but moreover, about what an active and alert community could do to deter similar and more dangerous crime in the future.

Gaithersburg police reported that the culprits—two teenagers, ages 15 and 17 from outside the affected communities—had been arrested. But residents of the Kentlands community, which of the three communi-

ties bore the brunt of the attacks, didn't go home thinking the problem was solved forever. Instead, community managers, and several homeowner leaders are spearheading an action to take back the peace, serenity and "sense of neighborhood" atmosphere that the Kentlands community is known for.

Often used as a blueprint of sorts for the "New Urbanism" that architecturally mixes single family, townhouse, condominium, and storefronts to encourage neighborhood interaction, the Kentlands is in an ideal position to exercise its community policing "philosophy" that works by bringing people together to solve problems.

It is a philosophy that David Weber, and senior trial attorney for the Treasury Department and a Kentlands resident who is coordinating the effort to begin a full-fledged neighborhood watch program, believes in. "Everyone is responsible for making this a great community," says Weber. In addition to selecting block captains who organize crime watch efforts within their own sub-communities, the Kentlands is also using the Internet as a communications tool.

The Neighborhood Watch Program is a highly successful effort that has been in existence for more than thirty years in cities and counties across America. It provides a unique infrastructure that brings together local officials, law enforcement and citizens to protect our communities – but getting the word out to a community with 5,000 residents requires sustained commitment and communication. Weber is actively organizing an e-mail communication network called the Kentlands Neighborhood Watch List_Serv to keep residents abreast of public safety developments and how each sub-community can help spot, report, and deter crime.

The speed and ease of the Internet make the list_serv an easy forum for residents to access, and virtually any community can bring their own residents together in a similar fashion: the Kentlands, for example, has utilized a groups forum format offered by the web site, Yahoo. The site allows online discussion through e-mail that provides residents with a cyber round-table for remarks, concerns, and ideas. Since the list_serv debuted on January 20, well over 100 families have joined the site, and it didn't take long for the site to start serving its purpose: In the first week of the list_serv's existence, the burglary of a home just outside of Kentlands was broadcast by the Gaithersburg Police Department to the members of list_serv a mere 90 minutes after the crime, says Weber. Gaithersburg Police included in the alert a description of the suspect.

Along with the list_serv, the Kentlands will also be utilizing many tried-and-true Neighborhood Watch programs, any or all of which can be applied to other communities, regardless of size:

Report anything suspicious. "Suspicious" can be any person, act, event, or situation that appears questionable. Anytime someone or something "just doesn't seem right to you" is when you should call the policies.

When reporting activity, be prepared by keeping numbers handy. Remain calm and avoid taking risks by staying away from the crime scene. When you call to report suspicious activity, the police will ask for your name, address, and telephone number. This information is requested in

MILLER ❖ DODSON ASSOCIATES

CAPITAL RESERVE CONSULTANTS

Replacement Reserve Studies are an essential element in the long-range financial planning of your community association. Proper Reserves serve to protect property values and prevent unpopular and costly special assessments!

Our Replacement Reserve Report offers:

- ❖ Realistic Funding Solutions
- ❖ Detailed Component Inventory
- ❖ Innovative, State-of-the-Art Software
- ❖ Easy-to-Understand Graphics and Text
- ❖ CAI Accredited Reserve Specialists (RS)
- ❖ Meets All National CAI Study Standards

Call or Visit Our Website for
More Information or a Free Quote:
1 . 8 0 0 . 8 5 0 . 2 8 3 5
www.MDAreserves.com

Formerly a Division of
US INSPECT