

FOCUS ON

Our Crime Prevention Unit: Working with apartment communities to reduce crime

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Officers Eric Rooks and Humberto Garcia are showing apartment communities that deterring criminal activity in their neighborhoods can be as easy as changing a light bulb. Since last April, the Crime Prevention Unit has been hard at work getting apartment communities on board with the Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program. So far, 26 communities have joined the program, with one site becoming fully certified already.

“These communities are realizing that their participation in this program is a win-win for them by keeping their residents safe and making their communities more desirable for new tenants,” Garcia said.

The Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program is a coordinated effort to improve the quality of life in multi-family communities by creating an environment where crime cannot flourish. The program began in Mesa, Arizona in 1992, and has since spread throughout the United States and Canada. Several partners are involved in the County’s program, including the Gwinnett County Police Department, the Atlanta Apartment Association, Gwinnett Clean and Beautiful, and the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District.

“We’ve been able to make a difference in apartment communities because we have the right people working together with a single goal to make these communities safe and viable options for living,” said District 2 Commissioner Lynette Howard.

Participants in the program are trained on how to properly screen for applicants who could potentially commit crime in their neighborhoods and what signs of criminal activity to look for in their communities. In addition, crime prevention officers conduct property inspections for sufficient lighting, clean and secured units and common areas, and proper landscaping. This approach is the concept behind crime prevention through environmental design, which suggests that property maintenance can reduce the likelihood of criminal activity.

Once the properties pass inspection, they host a safety social to help residents learn how they can take part in preventing crime in their neighborhoods. After the communities meet these requirements, they become certified Crime-Free Multi-Housing communities.

According to Rooks, the intent was to start the program in an area of the county where a high number of crimes were taking place in apartment communities. Based on crime statistics, they targeted the Sweetwater area in Duluth. Since the program’s start, crime has been reduced in the area by 12 percent. “This reduction in crime results in fewer calls coming from this area, which means that our officers can focus on other areas in the county,” said Rooks. “It’s a good thing for our apartment residents and our homeowners.”