

FOCUS ON:

Our Gang Unit: Adapting to the times to stomp out gang activity

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The Gang Unit uses a variety of tactics to gather information, including identifying gang paraphernalia and graffiti.

cyberspace.” He also said that hybrid gangs, which may consist of rival gang members, are on the rise, adding, “Making money is their motivation, even if it means teaming up with their enemies.”

The Gang Unit consists of one supervisor and six investigators. Two unit members are assigned to gang task forces coordinated by the ATF and the FBI. The Gang Unit’s main focus is gathering intelligence on gangs and other groups in Gwinnett and using it to solve crimes and stay on top of gang activity. The unit uses a variety of tactics to gather information, including identifying gang graffiti, interviewing gang members and their associates, and building relationships with residents in the community.



Gang Unit officers gather intelligence to stay abreast of gang activity and solve crimes. In 2013, the unit investigated 156 cases and made 107 arrests.

relationships is critical to the process of collecting intelligence and solving crimes,” Osterberg said.

Reducing gang activity is equally important, and to do so, Gang Unit officers conduct classes for parents and homeowner associations on gang awareness and prevention. In addition, unit officers are engaged in youth mentoring programs to encourage youth to stay out of gangs. Officers also urge parents to continually monitor their children’s behavior and activities and to play an active role in their kids’ lives. “Gang families should never replace the presence of a real family,” Osterberg said.

Just as the rest of the world has adapted to a mobile way of life, gangs have capitalized on digital tools to establish an online presence. While gang activity may not always be in plain sight, the Gwinnett County Police Department’s Gang Unit stays on the trail despite the clever tactics gang members use — whether on the street or on the Web.

Sgt. **E. S. Osterberg**, supervisor of the Gang Unit, has been involved with gang investigations for nearly 15 years and attests to the changes in recent gang activity. “In the past, gang members were easily identified by the colors they wear and were more concerned with protecting their turf and earning respect, but with the advent of social media, gangs are taking less to the streets and more to



Gangs take advantage of popular digital tools such as social media and online music videos to lure youth into becoming gang members.

The information they gather is not only used by the Gang Unit, but also the Criminal Investigations Division, other metro Atlanta jurisdictions, the GBI, and the FBI. In addition, the unit routinely provides intelligence to other units with gang-related cases such as homicides, armed robberies, and burglaries. “Having these

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