

FOCUS ON Police Department's Central Precinct: Taking a community approach to policing

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While *community service* refers to individuals who voluntarily (or in some cases, involuntarily) give their time to benefit others, the same can be said of the officers in the Police Department's Central Precinct. They have taken a strategic approach to addressing the increased levels of crime in the County's central commercial corridor and reducing the reoccurrence of specific criminal activity, benefitting everyone who lives and works in Gwinnett's central corridor.



The Police Department's Central Precinct responded to 141,127 calls in 2012

Central Precinct is the largest staffed and busiest in the Uniform Division, which is also the largest division in the police department. The precinct is comprised of morning, day, and evening watch shift units that respond to dispatched calls, a central traffic team, two community response teams, and a crime prevention officer. Two investigative units, burglary and gang, also work out of Central Precinct.



Two investigative units, gang and burglary, operate out of the Central Precinct

The precinct serves a 70-square mile area in central Gwinnett County, including two of the county's three major malls, Gwinnett Place Mall and Sugarloaf Mills. The precinct's service area includes a mix of commercial and industrial areas and a large concentration of multifamily communities. In addition, it includes some of the county's most affluent neighborhoods and low-income residences. The area is also culturally diverse, with a growing population of Hispanic and Asian residents.

To effectively address criminal activity, Central Precinct officers review CompStat reports, which analyze statistics over a two-week period. Whenever they notice an increase in crimes, the community

response teams, or CRTs, investigate the crimes to identify a pattern. "This is a huge benefit to our shift units and traffic detail because it frees them up to respond to the urgent incidents. Once a pattern has been identified, we know what we're looking for when we're out patrolling," said Lieutenant Alan Hutcherson, day watch supervisor.

"Recently, we noticed that there was an increase in smash and grab burglaries in commercial areas. These crimes can be difficult to stop because it only takes a matter of seconds to break a window or door and grab cash out of a register or snatch one altogether," said Major Christa Spradley, Central Precinct commander. They responded to the uptick in commercial burglaries by assigning their CRTs to evening and morning watch. "By the second night, we were able to get the perpetrator because we were in the right place at the right time," she added.

"While we may not be able to address all criminal activity in the same manner, this approach has helped us make a significant impact on reoccurring incidents



Traffic team officers conduct a security checkpoint

in the area,” Hutcherson said.

The CRT has also implemented a program to help locate stolen electronics that can be tracked, such as smartphones and tablets, and credit cards to help increase the department's chances of retrieving stolen items and apprehending those responsible for the thefts. “The tracking systems have been a huge help in locating stolen items as well as catching the suspects before they have a chance to commit more crimes,” Hutcherson said.

Spradley also noted the invaluable partnership the officers have built with the business community through the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District. “The CID has been crucial to building a rapport with the businesses in addition to making our multicultural business owners aware of the resources we provide to keep the Pleasant Hill corridor safe,” she said.

Spradley and Hutcherson stress the need for residents to be active participants in their personal safety. “We can’t say it enough: please lock your car doors, even when they’re parked in your driveway, and please don’t leave valuables in your car. These tips may seem simple, but it makes a huge difference in reducing your risk of being a victim,” they said.