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Crime Awareness

By Sophie Braccini

Crime Awareness is the title of an article that Moraga Police Chief Robert Priebe wrote for the latest Moraga About Town civic bulletin (online at www.moraga.ca.us). His department has hit the ground running in 2011, with a 50% increase in calls over the same time last year - as of January 28th, there were 61 calls, as compared to 41 in January of 2010.

2011's crimes-to-date include an armed robbery behind the Rheem Center and a multiple-car theft leading to a chase by the Moraga and Orinda Police Departments that ended in an accident near Orinda's Wagner Ranch Elementary School, which killed one of the suspects (27-year-old Christina Ramos of Hayward; at press time, other suspect(s) are still at large); along with residential and property thefts, including a case of electronic equipment stolen on the Saint Mary's College (SMC) campus that ended on January 27th with the arrest of two SMC students and the return of the stolen property. "We have definitely experienced a spike in January," says Priebe.

Moraga's police may go beyond their jurisdiction to arrest suspects. For example, in pursuit of individuals that stole a wallet from an unlocked car, Priebe's officers are conducting an investigation in Alameda County and will press charges against the suspects when they are identified. "Every time I send someone out to investigate, I need to pull off the streets one of the two officers who are here at all times," says Priebe, "it was good to effectively put the handcuffs on the thieves that stole SMC's property, but we needed three officers, including myself, and two officers from Walnut Creek to conduct the investigation and make the arrest; this is a very expensive operation for us."

Looking at statistics from 2009 and 2010, Priebe noted that his department is the least expensive per capita in the county. "In Moraga, residents pay \$122 a year per capita for police service; in Lafayette the cost is \$198; in Orinda \$223; \$416 in Kensington; and \$164 in Clayton. With such limited resources, people should not have unrealistic expectations about what we can do."

With one officer on leave, Priebe was not able to have the detective position he hoped for - "We are customer-service oriented and do our best with what we have," he says.

If something happens, Priebe recommends that you call 911 immediately from a land line (from a cell phone call Dispatch at 925-284-5010). Residents interested in starting a 'Neighborhood Watch' group should contact Lieutenant Jeff Price at (925) 888-7049.

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