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Rash of Burglaries in Orinda

By Lou Fancher

A rash of home burglaries in Orinda has Police Chief Jeffrey Jennings and his department asking the community to stay on the alert.

"This is a safe community but crimes of opportunity are just that. I believe in information sharing: an aware community is a safe community and with that in mind, we have tried to get the citizens of Orinda on the same page as the police department," Chief Jennings wrote in an email.

In a previous message from Detective Sergeant Neal Rafanan, sent to local agencies and the media on July 11th, residents were advised to report suspicious people and vehicles by calling the Sheriff's dispatch.

The unusually high number of daytime break-ins-44 between January and July 11th- have occurred between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Frequently, the burglars have selected unoccupied homes in more remote locations where the front doors are not visible from the street. The criminals watch residents leave their homes, or simply knock on the door of a targeted residence. If someone answers, the burglars pretend to be delivering a package to a neighbor or feign a false call for a utility inspection.

"They prefer homes without burglary systems, but are attracted to homes with hidden driveways and big picture windows with the curtains open or blinds up so they can see in. Audible alarms will scare them off quicker than a silent alarm," the Chief reported.

Portable items are the favored items, including electronics, jewelry and coins. Although firearms are not involved, Jennings warned that these are dangerous felons and residents should not pursue them.

"A citizen followed a suspicious vehicle to the Caldecott Tunnel and did not call the police department until it was too late for us to talk to the occupants," Jennings said. "We did get some valuable information but it would have been nice to have a conversation and identify these people."

The Orinda police department requested additional officers at no additional cost based on their contract with the Contra Costa County Office of the Sheriff. They also altered the deployment of personnel to place more officers in the neighborhoods.

Although the crisis is not over, by working cooperatively with other local jurisdictions, the police have several leads and have submitted five sets of burglars consisting of 21 people for prosecution.

Jennings advised residents to have the police department conduct a Burglary Prevention Audit to learn how to make their homes less attractive to thieves.

In addition to an audit, there are several immediate steps residents can take to secure their homes:

Install deep dead bolt locks on

all exterior doors

Make sure the street address

is visible from the street

Remove shrubbery from the front
of the home

Insure that everyone with access

to your home knows how to

operate the alarm system

properly. (There were 177 false

alarms in the month of June.)

Ultimately, the greatest security may arise from knowing your neighbors. Exchange phone numbers, organize a block-watch team, consider arranging for a house-sitter during longer absences, and use caution when encountering a stranger at your door.

"With these types of crimes of opportunities we need everyone to remain vigilant and call, if something doesn't look or feel right," Jennings concluded.

Call the 24 hour dispatch at 925-284-5010 or 925-646-2441. Also, program either one of these numbers into your cell phone and use 911 on your landline.

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[back](#)

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