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The Definition of "Suspicious Behavior"

Hawk-eyed residents help Orinda Police nab burglary suspects

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When advising residents how best to protect their homes, Orinda's finest frequently quote the words of law enforcement officials everywhere, "If you witness suspicious activity in your neighborhood," followed by the digits of the telephone number for a 24-hour police response line. Often, though, area residents fail to take timely enough action because they aren't quite sure what types of behavior may qualify as genuinely suspicious.

A fine example was recently provided for Lamorindans. Just past 11 a.m. August 7, a Muth Drive resident called Orinda's dispatch line to report what she thought might be questionable activity by several young men. She saw, according to the Orinda Police Department account, "someone exit a vehicle and knock on doors of homes while three occupants remained in the car," and "provided a general description of the vehicle." Dispatch personnel were later informed that the four suspects from the car - all juveniles - "went to the rear of (a) house on Muth Drive." A second Orindan, calling in later, reported a potential residential burglary on Martha Road. Thanks to both tips, an Orinda Police sergeant and his colleagues were alerted. The sergeant pulled over a vehicle matching the first caller's description at Camino Pablo and Brookwood. Other officers conducting a search of the home which was allegedly burglarized were able to confirm that a crime had indeed occurred.

Police were able to recover weapons (a shotgun and a knife), cash, jewelry, cameras, and musical instruments. "An in-field line up was conducted with the four juveniles who were positively identified as the suspects," said police representatives. "The four were arrested for residential burglary and conspiracy" and booked into Juvenile Hall. In both cases, said Orinda Police Chief Jeffrey Jennings, callers noticed activity that differed from regular neighborhood routines. Jennings commended the citizen callers for their quick thinking, and reminded all residents that the personnel who staff the dispatch line are trained to evaluate whether the behavior being reported is actually suspicious or not. So, even if residents doubt what they are witnessing or are hesitant to report, he urged members of the community to still call in for advice: (925) 284-5010. Delays in reporting by residents can cost investigators precious seconds to apprehend fleeing suspects and may also impact their ability to gather evidence that may be critical to obtaining convictions.

Lafayette police are now also investigating the four suspects to determine whether or not the group may be linked to additional unsolved burglaries in their city.

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