

Crackdown turns around crime in Minneapolis

Apprehending the worst offenders and putting more cops on the streets has helped stem violent crime, which spiked last year and remains high in other large cities. Burglaries, however, are on the rise.

By [DAVID CHANEN](#), Star Tribune

Last update: December 29, 2007 - 7:12 PM

Bucking the trend of many large cities in the United States, violent crime in Minneapolis dropped significantly in 2007.

A focus on reducing crime by juveniles and arresting the city's most dangerous and chronic offenders, bolstered by more than 50 new officers hitting the streets, reduced the total number of violent crimes -- homicides, robberies, aggravated assaults and rapes -- by 13 percent.

The I-35W bridge collapse took hundreds of officers away from their regular duties in August, but the department still arrested 2,000 more people than the previous year.

The drop in Minneapolis crime is a turnaround from 2006, when a rash of homicides and robberies drove violent crimes to their highest level since 1997. This year, Detroit, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Oakland and Colorado Springs are among the cities struggling to match Minneapolis' success.

But in Minneapolis, burglaries became the most troublesome trend in 2007. The 5,990 burglaries in the city were the highest number since 1998. Officers spent more time making sure the rising number of vacant houses created by foreclosure didn't attract criminal activity. While four gangs lost their foothold in the city, 14-year-old Charez Jones was killed in the crossfire of rival gang members as she left a party.

Council Member Don Samuels said residents in his North Side ward were feeling quite a bit safer, but "you have to be really cautious when you celebrate these crime stats."

If the pattern continues, Chief Tim Dolan wants officers to concentrate on livability crimes and specific neighborhood policing plans.

"We don't want it to stop here," Samuels said. "We are still losing kids to the streets."

In St. Paul, year-end statistics are expected to show that violent crimes and property crimes both were down in 2007, with crimes against people falling "substantially," police spokesman Tom Walsh said. Police expect robbery to be the only crimes-against-persons category to have increased from a year ago, although he added it was not at a level that has caused alarm.

The Minneapolis Police Department's Fourth Precinct, which covers north Minneapolis, had double-digit decreases in violent crime. More patrol officers were assigned to the area, and the city spent more than \$1 million for surveillance cameras and sensors that pinpoint gunshot locations. On the downside, 27 of the city's 47 homicides happened in the precinct.

But Mike Martin, the precinct's inspector, said "we're at a turning point on the North Side, and we have to take advantage of it." He senses a change in the community's tolerance of crime.

"When people learned a store on W. Broadway was selling T-shirts with gang symbols, they told the owners that didn't represent the values in the neighborhood," he said. "And they pulled them off the shelves."

Even with less available overtime and officers lost through attrition, arrests in the precinct increased 3 percent. Jerry Moore, executive director of the Jordan area community council in north Minneapolis, said the crime stats provide hope, but officers aren't paying attention to livability issues such as cars with booming stereos, loiterers and street-level drug dealing.

"When trying to entice a change, people look at the personality of a neighborhood," he said. "These things wouldn't be ignored in Richfield or Edina. But people in Jordan are talking about the issues rather than just shutting their doors."

In another positive development for north Minneapolis, more than 2,000 permanent and temporary jobs were created there this year, Samuels said. Along W. Broadway and Penn Avenue, a new YWCA, several restaurants, a grocery store, senior housing and a new home for community radio station KMOJ have appeared or are on the way, he said.

Shutting down several problem convenience stores and dealing with troublesome houses and apartments freed up hundreds of hours officers spent repeatedly responding to 911 calls at those locations, said Mayor R.T. Rybak. That time can now be used on preventive policing and continued juvenile crime initiatives, which gained national attention this year, he said.

Juvenile crime fell about 20 percent in 2007. A new unit with 18 officers that targets teens with warrants played an important role, Dolan said. Officers are also hitting truancy and curfew violators, and a new center to link offenders with social services opens in January.

"We could have all the plans in the world, but you need the officers to produce," Dolan said. "And they did a great job in 2007."

Police arrested more than 54,000 people and recovered 900 guns. The department's Violent Offender Task Force, which partners with the FBI and ATF, was responsible for knocking down a gang-run drug ring that peddled crack only in the Phillips neighborhood in south Minneapolis.

Violent crime in the Third Precinct, which includes Phillips, is down five percent this year.

Still, "I don't think people feel safe in Phillips," said Clyde Bellecourt, co-chairman of the Police Community Relations Council. "I don't see people walking alone at night, and more houses seem to have bars on windows."

The Second Precinct, with neighborhoods in northeast and southeast, had a 29 percent drop in violent crime, the largest in the city. Downtown business owners and residents have told Dolan that they feel

safer because of more beat officers, a full-time horse patrol and stepped-up patrols of bus stops along 7th Street.

There were 500 fewer robberies in 2007. Lt. Mike Fossum, head of the robbery unit, said the Hennepin County attorney's office should be commended for filing cases with the strongest possible charges and not automatically allowing a plea bargain.

Fifth Precinct Inspector Kris Arneson, who is dealing with an 18 percent increase in burglaries in southwest Minneapolis, would like to see a similar response to career burglars.

Staff writer Anthony Lonetree contributed to this report.

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