

## **Katherine Kersten: News from the crime beat that you'll be happy to read about**

By **KATHERINE KERSTEN**, Star Tribune

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We've grown used to lamenting out-of-control crime in Minneapolis. So we need to celebrate the great news we got last month. In 2007, violent crime was down 13 percent citywide.

That number might seem like a lifeless statistic. But Inspector Mike Martin of the Fourth Precinct in North Minneapolis has done the math. The turnaround from 2006 trends, he says, means that in the Fourth Precinct in 2007, "one less person was a victim of homicide, 38 women were not raped, 159 people were not robbed, 127 people were not shot, stabbed or beaten severely, 178 fewer people had someone burglarize their home and 188 people did not have their cars stolen."

What's behind this success? A new juvenile crime initiative has helped slash youth crime by almost 20 percent. It has a dual focus: getting violent youths off the street while simultaneously combatting low-level offenses like curfew and truancy violations.

In the first week of 2008, incredibly, there were no crimes involving juveniles in the whole First Precinct, which includes downtown, said Minneapolis Police Chief Tim Dolan.

But smarter law enforcement is only one factor in improved safety, says Martin. In the last five years, he says he has seen a "sea change" in community standards -- the behavior that folks on the North Side expect or tolerate.

Inspired leadership has played a key role here. "In recent history, a lot of times good people weren't determining the North Side's future," says Martin. "Some who wrongly claimed to speak for the North Side were treated as leaders. Now they are being marginalized."

As a result, "good citizens are feeling supported," he said. "They are starting to stand up -- not tolerate, not apologize for criminals. They are being honest about what needs to take place to reduce crime, improve livability, and encourage economic investment on the North Side."

Martin points to City Council member Don Samuels' well-publicized confrontation last fall with a store owner who sold T-shirts that celebrated gangs. Under pressure, the merchant agreed to stop.

"Five years ago, you would have had people saying, 'You're harassing that guy, that's a cultural thing,'" says Martin. "Now no one's defending the guy who fosters a gang subculture."

The city's Grocery Store Task Force is another symbol of change. It brings together three city departments -- regulatory services, fire, police -- plus the city attorney's office, to improve operating conditions at problem stores, or shut them down.

In the last two years, the Task Force has closed at least eight convenience stores. Three of them together generated more than 1,540 police calls in 2005 and 430 in 2006. Police calls to those locations nearly stopped completely after they closed, according to the Minneapolis Communications Department.

Paradoxically, the crime drop is occurring when both the city and police department are doing "more with less," according to Martin. The funding crunch that began in 2003, when the state decreased local government aid, has compelled both public officials and private foundations to "focus on programs and agencies and people who work," says Martin. "We couldn't just keep throwing hundreds of thousands of dollars at everything, funding everyone who walked through the door."

One more factor promises to keep the North Side -- and the city -- moving forward: An ambitious and innovative focus on economic development. This is not the sort of hit-or-miss activity we've seen in the past, but a coordinated approach with a proven track record.

On the North Side, the non-profit American Indian Neighborhood Development Corp. (AINDC) is working on a 5-acre, \$60 million retail and office project on West Broadway. The group's revolutionary approach emphasizes "crime prevention through environmental design" -- by removing long, dark corridors, for example. It also stresses the importance of a healthy mix of businesses, including high-traffic operations with extended hours, like the 24-hour YWCA that will anchor the Broadway development. "Busy streets are safe streets," explains executive director Theresa Carr.

On Broadway, the AINDC aims to duplicate the success of its 7-acre shopping center on East Franklin Avenue, which has transformed that neighborhood. After the center's construction, crime in every category fell within a six-block radius. In 1999, the area had 432 narcotics arrests. By 2002-03, that number had fallen by half, and in 2006, there were only 62, says Carr.

But as the North Side overcomes challenges, new ones spring up.

"We're on the right track," says Martin. "But we're at a strategic point. We had 1,500 foreclosed houses in the last year. One house like that can destroy a neighborhood."

Last year, some good people won important battles against crime in Minneapolis. The war goes on.

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