

Who Is Watching The Watchers

By Sherry McCourt, Executive VP of Elite Protection Specialists and Committee Member of the WCCPC

Most people can drive down any neighbourhood and recognize a “Block Parent” sign. Most children, when asked, know this to mean that this is a safe place to go to should they be afraid or need some help. Do people really just hang a sign in their window and we then allow our children and ourselves to believe this is a safe haven?

What if you were told that we have approximately 350 “Block Parents” in our city to date! How did all these households receive their signs? Who is responsible for these seemingly good citizens?

The Windsor Citizen’s Crime Prevention Committee (WCCPC) has played a vital role in sustaining the Block Parent program in Windsor since September of 1996. Local authorities screen all “Block Parent” volunteers, instruction and support is then given by the WCCPC.

Armed with the knowledge that our neighbourhoods are not as safe as years ago, coupled with the fact that we are busier than we have ever been, who is watching our neighbourhoods?

The sad truth is that most of us would be hard pressed to know the person who lives a few doors down much less what would be considered “normal” activity in our own neighbourhood.

Did you know that in your neighbourhood tonight there could be a “Neighbourhood Watch” meeting? Citizens will learn how to make their homes and their selves less vulnerable to thieves and how to be alert to suspicious activity in their neighbourhood and everyday lives. WCCPC averages 30-40 Neighbourhood Watch meetings annually and approximately 35-40 citizens attend each meeting. At present WCCPC have a solid volunteer base of approximately 500 people throughout the city.

In fact, while driving through the different neighbourhoods between the hours of 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. you will find all of the porch lights on and the neighbourhood alive and busy with activity. You have just found a “Neighbors Night Out” event, organized by WCCPC. The key to success of this particular program is that the residents are working together throughout the neighbourhood, to effectively create their own crime prevention circle.

What about our neighbors who live in apartment buildings, they have security cameras and intercoms to keep them safe... correct? How many times have we heard of the late night caller who rings as many apartments as necessary before some unsuspecting tenant lets them in? The WCCPC “Apartment Watch” program is designed to form a network of communication between the tenants and the Windsor Police Department. The Apartment Watch program teaches the tenants how to get the most from the security systems in place as well as alerting to suspicious activities in their building.

What about our seniors, we have all heard of the horrible crimes committed against our seniors. The WCCPC supports the “Seniors Taking Extra Precautions” (S.T.E.P.) program, an educational program designed to increase our senior’s knowledge of how to protect themselves in their homes and community while decreasing their risk and fear of victimization. Approximately 20 S.T.E.P meetings are held annually.

Have you noticed how amazing our city parks are? And I am positive that the neighbourhoods that live adjacent to our city parks appreciate a well taken care of park, which surely adds to their enjoyment. Equally how awful would it be to live next to a park plagued with vandalism, undesirable activity and a “hang out” for threatening individuals?

At the request of the City’s Parks and Forestry Services, the WCCPC developed “Park Watch”. Park Watch is designed to provide a presence at each park on a regular basis and has grown to include 21 of our city parks.

The last four programs organized and supported by the WCCPC, all though still work within neighbourhoods, really touch our city as a whole.

The first being our “Wipe Out Graffiti” program. Business such as Glidden Paint, Advantage Graffiti Control, ABC Signs and Tim Horton’s have supported the WCCPC and joined the fight in beautifying our city. The Windsor Police Department and City’s Park and Forestry Services have been instrumental partners in the continuous battle of “wiping out graffiti”.

If I told you that I could make you walk on the left side of a hallway without you realizing that I have forced you to... you would think I was insane. But truth be told businesses use tools and techniques in our every day lives that makes us respond to them without us ever being consciously aware. As an example, restaurants will play upbeat music in their restaurant to make us chew faster, thus our dining experience is that much quicker allowing for new dinners to flow through.

So if we take this same type of approach in crime prevention, imagine what we could prevent. WCCPC regularly conducts “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” (CPTED) surveys on both residential homes and businesses within our community. The proven recommendations offered during such a survey is invaluable yet the WCCPC offers this at no charge knowing that if we all work together our city will be a much safer place to live work and play.

The newest program organized through WCCPC is called “Community Emergency Response Volunteers” (CERV). Could you imagine what living through one of the many hurricanes from this past year would have been like? What if you had the knowledge and

support of an entire team, who had been trained to provide aid to those hurt and frighten people? What if you and your training were the very reason the emergency professionals could save additional lives? What if you held within yourself the knowledge to save your own family in an emergency situation? Well you can! The entire purpose of the CERV program, under the direction of the Windsor Fire Services Emergency Response Team, is designed to provide us with the tools to protect our possessions and reduce the risk of harm to our loved ones and our neighbourhoods. I would be remised if I didn't mention all of the organizations that have helped approximately 70 volunteers' graduate from this program. They are Windsor Fire and Rescue, EMS, Union Gas, Enwin Utilities, Red Cross, Victim Services, and Active Canadian.

The final program organized through WCCPC is named "P.R.I.D.E. Players" (Promoting Respect in Dramatic Exhibits) A group of theatrical high school and university students, traveling to different communities, performing anti-vandalism plays for our children. The plays not only deter vandalism but also promote good citizenship and pride in our community. W.C.C.P.C. receives a federal S.E.E.D. grant to hire students to oversee this program, what is absolutely amazing is that these talented students oversee the entire program, from writing the script to booking the venues to conducting the performances.

As Didi Martin, Coordinator of WCCPC and Mike Hradowy Assistant Coordinator of WCCPC both agree that it is time to take back our community and that our strongest tools are education and working together.

The Windsor Citizen's Crime Prevention Committee would not have been able to provide the above programs without the generous sponsorships of local businesses and the countless hours of many volunteers.

Friends of the Windsor Citizens' Crime Prevention Committee is the fundraising heart of the WCCPC and continues to empower local businesses to help themselves and their community through corporate sponsorship.

The WCCPC encourages community minded individuals who are interested in helping our community in the fight against crime.

The Windsor Citizens' Crime Prevention Committee conducts regular monthly meetings on the third Thursday of each month at 3:30 p.m.

For more information or if you would like to volunteer please contact
Windsor Crime Prevention Phone: (519)255-6173 ext.6 Fax: (519)973-4935
Email: wincrime@bellnet.ca
Graffiti Hotline Number (519) 977-6143

Or visit: www.wincrime.ca or the City of Windsor website www.citywindsor.ca and look under council committees.