

The City

The Grass-roots Crime Fighters

By Christine Klampe

■ It's Friday night in San Francisco's Visitation Valley, a high crime residential area of the city. Louise Hampton has opened her doors to neighbors on the block. It is not an uncommon scene in San Francisco today, due to the work of Project SAFE, a citizens' crime prevention program. These people are gathered together out of fear to talk about crime and strategies to prevent crime. This subject is dealt with daily by residents of this area.

The mild-mannered black mother hosting this gathering says that she shoots her gun into the air to scare away kids loitering in trees in the back lot.

A young white man in a bicycle cap enthusiastically suggests that neighbors form partnerships to invest in silent alarm systems.

Another man reports that within two or three weeks of the initiation of a whistle system on Teddy Avenue, the breaking of windows and slashing of tires had virtually stopped.

The formal meeting begins when Project SAFE coordinator Norman Nesby makes some introductions and gives a brief background on the program. Then the floor is open. There are questions and comments about break-ins, police response time, fear of reprisal, anonymous phone calls and unreported crimes. Discussion is triggered by each new question. Everyone has something to say about crime.

Officer Dennis Gustafson arrives to present the "locks and bolts" information — the police component of this civilian-police undertaking. He is a mustachioed young man wearing a windbreaker and a t-shirt. He dispenses some good advice on common sense measures and concrete steps for implementing better household security.

Then he shows a crime prevention film story starring Raymond Burr, and the meeting is over.

Project SAFE is one of many citizens' safety projects known nationwide under various titles such as Neighborhood Alert and Neighborhood Watch. The intent of this grass-roots program is to reduce the opportunities for committing crimes by creating neighborhood



Photograph by Charles Bolton

block clubs to expand (or open) channels of communication between law enforcement agencies and the community, thereby encouraging public awareness and responsibility in crime prevention strategies. Subsequent meetings will deal with Operation Identification — a system for marking valuables that dovetails with the home alert efforts.

During the past year, the San Francisco SAFE office has operated on a budget of \$304,000, most of which is going to salaries and neighborhood offices. Controversy has centered around the primary source of the funding — the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), presently supplemented by other funding sources — Title VI, CETA (\$150,000) and Title II (\$200,000). Funding for the Safe Streets Program originated with Lyndon Johnson in the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act in 1968. Some congressmen were initially concerned over the power given to the attorney general and the possible creation of a national police force. However, others saw it as a safety valve to release some of the public pressure to act on the crime issue.

The All People's Coalition (APC), of the liberal-left bent of Saul Alinsky, helped bring Project SAFE into San Francisco in 1975. The original citizens' safety experiment involved five districts. In the same year, Governor Brown dismissed the SAFE streets program as "hardware for the conservatives and software for the liberals."

Intrigued by Governor Brown's choice of words, I set out to find out if this SAFE program was having any effect on crime. Following are notes on nearly a year's worth of meetings and conversations.

January, 1978: Hall of Justice.

Henry Izumizaki is the civilian coordinator of San Francisco's Project SAFE. Contrary to the average citizen's crime prevention program, which focuses primarily on "locks and bolts" and property security, Izumizaki says that San Francisco's program intends to be much more. He says that merely institu-

ting measures for reducing opportunities for committing crimes is the "tip of the iceberg." "Reducing opportunities for commission of crimes creates another problem, that of displacement." (The so-called "mercury effect." That is, you move a criminal from one neighborhood to another.)

Izumizaki continues, "We can't think in a vacuum. It's a question of the haves and the have nots." Citing the numerous problems unique to San Francisco (geographical barriers, ethnic and linguistic differences), Izumizaki expresses concern for not just crime, but for the delivery of community services to the entire San Francisco population. He sees Project SAFE as "empowering neighborhood groups to become self-centered." After they address their own local needs, they can then make decisions on how to combine with other self interests throughout the city.

January 26, 1978: Hall of Justice.

This was the first meeting of the Citywide Project SAFE Advisory Board. People there represented different constituencies from all over the city.

As was to happen numerous times, discussion centered around crime statistics and what, in fact, they really counted. Lieutenant Frank Jordan, the police coordinator of Project SAFE, stated, "The statistics are validated two times — by the State of California and the San Francisco Police Department. There is less than .05 of 1 percent of an error."

However, the statistical figures on crime were not being challenged, but rather other factors relating to their interpretation. Jane McCaskle Murphy of the Police Commission raised this question: If several crimes are committed in one incident — let's say burglary — which one is counted statistically? It turned out the most heinous one is counted.

The mention of juvenile vs. adult crime statistics introduced the other major area of concern expressed at this meeting — juvenile delinquency and crime motivators and prevention.

Jane McCaskle Murphy again spoke up,

suggesting hitting new avenues for possible success, e.g. the entertainment field, third largest industry in the country, as a provider of outlets for creativity of youth as actors, performers, scriptwriters, news reporters, talent show participants and photographers.

Another woman countered with, "That doesn't solve the problem. The problem lies with the parents. We have to help them understand where the child is going — what he's doing."

After a brief exchange, people agreed that young people in the city do need attention. There was a general consensus that split sessions in schools make it difficult to identify where a child is supposed to be. Inviting Dr. Alioto to the next meeting of the Citywide Council was seen as one way to address the problem.

Project SAFE Staff Meeting: January 30, 1978.

The staff meeting serves as an educational device for the staff and a weekly informational clearing house. At this particular session, representatives from both the Victim/Witness Assistance Program and the Queen's Bench spoke about how they help victims.

Mark Forrester, coordinator of SAFE in the Tenderloin District, explained the Senior Citizens Protective Escort Service and the tough screening process needed to have the program in complete operation by November of 1978. Alluding to the potential disasters inherent in such a program, Forrester said, "The escorts must not victimize the seniors. The client population will do the direct screening. There are preferences on the part of different groups as to who they want as escorts. One example is the Tenderloin, where they want males, big and black."

February 16, 1978: Washington High School.

At Mayor Moscone's Town Hall Meeting on Crime, Project SAFE was recognized and suggested as a possible deterrent to crime in the city. Police Captain Booker Anderson said the crime rate was cut by 7.6 percent in 1977 — a "dramatic decrease" over what had occurred the several years previous. Comparing January of 1978 with January of 1977, Captain Anderson said, "Violent crime is down 19 percent from a year ago. The forecast for 1978 is that we are moving forward, 1977 has also meant the growth of the SAFE program. Whether those somewhat happy statistics are a direct result of Project SAFE we don't know."

The panel of speakers at this meeting included the mayor, the chief of police, the undersheriff, and representatives from the district attorney's office, the public defender's office and the juvenile and adult probation departments.

The audience included interested and concerned citizens who made it their business to attend a town hall meeting on crime. The citizens — ranging from a foster mother living in a Visitacion Valley housing project to a liquor store owner in the outer Richmond District — raised countless issues: beat cops, method of police department deployment,

"Project SAFE creates block clubs to expand communication between law enforcement agencies and the community."

funding for a work furlough program for women criminals, creation of a civilian investigating unit within the police department. Some were associated with Project SAFE. Some were representing neighborhood or merchants' councils and some had come on their own. All were citizens involved enough to ask questions and demand some accountability from their public servants.

Plugging for citizen involvement was Duff Rogers, assistant coordinator in Project SAFE's Telegraph Hill area, who said, "SAFE provides the educational service needed for citizen participation. More police isn't the answer, if people won't get behind the police enough."

The Town Hall meeting on crime ended with an impassioned speech by Undersheriff Jim Denman about prison reform.

March 1, 1978: Visitacion Valley Advisory Committee.

This meeting was held in the Leland Avenue Cloverleaf Realtors Office, which doubles as a SAFE office. People were scattered about in rocking chairs and a few children sat crosslegged on the floor. They conducted their usual business of minutes reading, passed some by-laws and postponed approval of the personnel procedures. When the floor opened for discussion, the often repeated concern for youth was expressed most vehemently by a Spanish-speaking woman.

The entrance of Supervisor Dan White changed the tone of the meeting. He was there about an incident in the Portola District that had recently received some press. He was asked to explain his statement that the people of San Francisco should go out and form committees, sort of like vigilante committees. Dan White dismissed it as sensationalism, saying he had never mentioned vigilantes.

His presence as a supervisor generated all sorts of new discussion and a personal invitation to visit the projects and speak with the people there. Two times he evaded the requests. The third time he was asked by persistent woman, he promised to visit his constituents in the housing projects.

March 9, 1978: Special Meeting on the Police Budget, Visitacion Valley.

The proposed police budget was beginning to stir up some debate, so March 9th found me sitting in the parish hall at the Church of the Visitacion. At this special meeting Tony Loar, president of the Visitacion Valley Project SAFE Advisory Council, spoke for the community when he said, "Some of the police act like crime is a hardship one has to endure if one lives in this area."

In a statement prepared for the press, Tony Loar reported the following: "A lady in the Sunnydale Projects called the police about a young man having a shotgun pointed in the

back of another person. So when the police arrived, she explained what happened. This was their remarks — 'That isn't anything. This happens all the time in this neighborhood.' Her daughter then told them she knew the person who had the gun. The police wanted to know the address. Since she didn't know the address offhand, she told them that she could show them where this person lived. They refused to go with her." Loar, stating that this was rotten police work, said, "How in the hell can the citizens of this community have respect for police like that?" Following this statement, Visitacion Valley made their demands for greater police visibility (more cops) and accountability (the creation of an Office of Citizens Complaint).

Chief Charles Gain was there to respond. He said that it was obviously "roast the police" night. Since both the police department and Project SAFE are under the auspices of Chief Gain, he is in a unique position to witness the polarization that exists between police and community.

The 300 residents attending that night got what they came for — a promise of more officers for their high-crime area. The accountability factor (inclusion of the Office of Citizens Complaint in the police budget) was a point yet to be tested — in the Finance Committee meetings of the Board of Supervisors. (It was defeated in May, but will be raised again next year.)

Asked what sort of relationship he had with Project SAFE, Captain Robert McFarland of Southeast Station replied, "A good one. I see eye-to-eye with them on most things. And I hope a Project like SAFE will encourage people to use their eyes and ears. One effect of Project SAFE is that it helps people to help themselves. If people are reporting suspicious activity — whenever they see something, anything, unusual — police appreciate the report. They would rather have ten false alarms than not to be called at all."

McFarland went on, "Of course, they prefer that people follow up by testifying, but this isn't necessary. Many people still are not reporting incidents because of fear of reprisal or retaliation, and a lack of faith in the police."

Querying him about the youth problem that had come up at so many meetings, he had a lot to say and from a slightly different perspective. About teenagers: "If we could keep kids off the streets and in the schools, we could eliminate major crime by 60 percent. But with kids on half-day sessions and the policy of open campus, it's difficult to enforce. Also, after sixteen, kids don't have to attend school legally."

Citing one of the areas where Project SAFE was most effective in reducing crime, McFarland told about the removal of bushes by the Housing Authority people. "Kids were hiding in the bushes and attacking cars — taking CB radios and attacking old people."

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Setting forth what the police are up against, McFarland said, "The kids have a sophisticated system they use at night with flashlights to warn of approaching vehicles — the police, whomever. The more pressure we put on, the more sophisticated they get."

"During the daytime, shopping centers and bus stops provide congregation centers. It's difficult to prevent them hanging around when they haven't done anything wrong."

There was a Hunters Point police-community relations meeting May 18 at the Silver Avenue health center. There I witnessed another level of police and community interaction.

After minutes were read and Jule Johnson introduced herself as running for the school board. Captain McFarland reported that Circus Vargas had been a fiasco. Circus Vargas had felt "no need for security officers." (Slight chuckling around the room.) The police initially rejected the permit to have the circus at Candlestick Park and had warned the carnival about the danger of putting a carnival next to a housing project — that they were, in effect, inviting trouble with kids. Circus Vargas had replied that "carny people were tough." The Board of Permit Appeals okayed their permit... and Circus Vargas had gotten royally ripped off.

Next was a report on the drag-racing on Sunday nights at Carroll and Evans Street. Due to a special Sunday night detail (6:30 to 11), only about twenty vehicles showed up — as opposed to a minimum of 300 on other Sunday nights. The displacement theory echoed true as McFarland said, "We've just moved them someplace else in the Bay Area. We'll continue passing calls to see that they don't get started again."

Harold Madison, president of the Shafter Avenue Community Block Club, reported, "Nice meeting down to the police commission about the decoy unit."

People were outspoken in their praise of McFarland. "Don't know what we'd do without a captain like you." (Little did they know that just weeks later, they would be doing without a captain like him; he retired early post-Proposition 13.)

Individuals gave reports from their respective blocks. Congratulations were given on removing the drug people and making arrests on one corner. One lady reported a car stripped

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meeting in May, people gave reports from their blocks.

*...selling dope to two little girls on Revere
...and Keith*

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Jessie Banks of Innis Avenue block club reported, "Well, there's not too much good news from Hunters Point. A child from the neighborhood killed for no reason whatsoever. . . another shooting of a Muni driver. . . something has to be done with our children. We can't give up. We have to have faith in God and our police force."

During the summer months, in addition to their block club work, crime prevention people focused on the implementation of the Senior Citizens Protective Escort Service and the effects of Proposition 13 on youth programs in the city.

After Proposition 13, the net effect was no summer school — a problem to which Rufus Watkins, coordinator of Hunters Point SAFE, addressed himself. He worked closely with ministers to set up alternate church summer schools.

The Richmond District SAFE office was instrumental in operating a youth council, which ran a summer jobs search program by canvassing merchants door-to-door. Funding came through a \$500 grant from United Way's Youth Project. The youth council also sponsored a youth day, a picnic at Tilden Park in the East Bay and several teenage disco dances.

The Senior Citizens Protective Escort Service, under the leadership of Mark Forrester, began in July with a month-long training session, which included First Aid, CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and crime prevention techniques. The basic job of the escort is to accompany a senior citizen to a doctor's appointment, to do banking, shopping and other necessary errands or to go on occasional recreation ventures. Additionally, escorts were trained to create a dialogue for analyzing other needs, such as inadequate allocation of food stamps, problems with SSI checks, and nonreceipt of renters' rebate from the State.

In August, with the opening of senior escort offices and phone lines, the staff began their outreach efforts. Flyers were distributed in Chinese, Tagalog, English and Spanish. The four target areas of Chinatown, Tenderloin, Western Addition and Hunter Point-Bayview opened with \$500,000 from the mayor's community development grant. Expansion of the program

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for escort services
into operation
September."



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into North Beach, Hayes Valley, South of Market and Potrero Hill came through city parking tax monies to the tune of \$150,000 — an awesome figure in the wake of Proposition 13 and an indication of the city's commitment to the program.

The actual escorting of seniors began in September.

September also brought a subtle organizational change to Project SAFE. No longer were Henry Izumizaki, civilian coordinator, and Lieutenant Frank Jordan, police coordinator, sharing equal rank and reporting respectively to Chief Gain. Lieutenant Jordan was appointed commander of the newly created Crime Prevention Education Division of the San Francisco police department. Project SAFE is one component and the escort program is the other component. As a result, these two programs are now projected for inclusion in the permanent police department budget.

In October there were large turnouts at two separate potlucks showing sustained interest in the Project SAFE program. Over 200 people attended each of these no-budget affairs supported by local merchants and community — one at Lowell High School in the Taraval and the other at the Jewish Community Center in the Richmond District.

On October 28, 1978, a Bay Area-wide Crime Prevention conference was held at Fort Mason. Opening remarks by Mayor George Moscone stated that this conference would not have happened three or four years ago nor without the presence of Project SAFE. Remarks by both the mayor and Reg Murphy, editor of the San Francisco *Examiner*, show that crime and crime prevention are being taken seriously by the city of San Francisco.

The turnout of about 160 people for this all-day affair included both law enforcement officials and private citizens — the latter dominating. Sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, which has been involved in police-community relations for a number of years, this conference grew out of a similar NCCJ conference on crime prevention in Los Angeles about six months ago — attended primarily by law enforcement officials. It was planned by the four Bay Area counties where citizen-based groups are the strongest: San Francisco, San Mateo, Contra Costa and Alameda.

Paul Cummins, head of the juvenile division of the district attorney's office, spoke on "Youth and the Crimi-

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nal Justice System" on November 2 at a special meeting of Ingleside's Project SAFE. He said he finds a program like SAFE valuable. "More people are reporting crimes and becoming witnesses. They notice clothing and are more aggressive about getting a car license number. From the district attorney's perspective, after Project SAFE, people become more willing to testify. Project SAFE erases to some small degree the fear of seeing the defendant again."

Has Project SAFE been effective? Lieutenant Jordan, head of the crime prevention division, says, "It's a fact that burglary is reduced where SAFE is active. It's the first time in four and a half years that burglary showed a decrease. The continuing trend downwards is perhaps due to Project SAFE's Home Alert, Operation Identification and news media saturation."

Louise Hampton says that her block club is still meeting. "We look out more for each other. When one of us goes away for a couple of days, we knock on the neighbor's door and leave the keys with them to look after our place."

What is the future for Project SAFE in San Francisco? Funding exists for a good part of 1979, but what is the force and direction behind its continuance?

Henry Izumizaki sees the force in the Citywide SAFE Advisory Council, which he feels has had considerable impact. He says, "The Council is comprised of the heads of block clubs and other private citizens, unpaid, dedicated and energetic. They want to pursue reduction of crime and true prevention programs. They want more than moving a criminal from one place to another. The council can be advocates for change. This is a real good step, even if no funding continues for SAFE. If that kind of enthusiasm exists, Project SAFE will have served its purpose — sustaining that enthusiasm and creating a vehicle for citizens becoming vocal participants."

The council plans to conduct a major criminal justice survey of every criminal justice practitioner in the city, eliciting individual thoughts about the criminal justice system. It will go to cops, district attorneys, public defenders and judges. A similar poll will go to all block clubs, to assure citizen input. A survey like this has never been done. □



"The SAFE Council plans to conduct a major criminal justice survey."