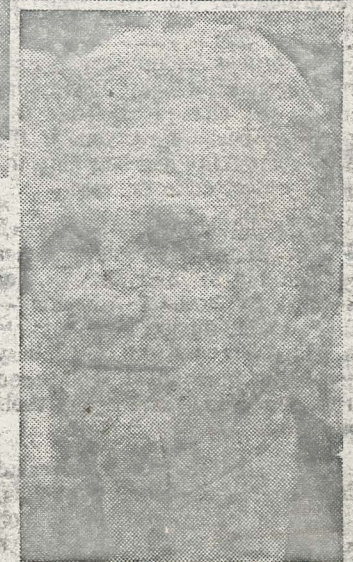




Examiner Photos by Greg Robinson

When Harry Aleo (inset) handed out a letter to his neighbors concerning the burglary of his West Portal home he had no idea how many concerned residents would turn out to talk over crime in the ostensibly 'low crime' area.

Daylight burglary reveals neighborhood's dark fear



By Ivan Sharpe

Like the thousands of other San Franciscans who are burglarized every month, Harry Aleo was angry and frustrated when he came home from golfing one day last month and found his front door smashed.

The 56-year-old insurance and real estate broker was amazed, however, that the daylight burglar could break through his solid-panel, double-lock door without any of his West Portal neighbors apparently hearing it.

His loss wasn't great — about \$600 in watches and jewelry and family heirlooms — but it meant a lot to him and he wanted to catch the thief. He began checking with his neighbors.

What he found amazed him even more. Three or four homes had been broken into in his block of Forest Side just a short time

before. And in his district, 15 homes had been robbed within the previous three weeks.

"I was shocked to find so much criminal activity in this district, which is supposed to be a low-crime area," he said. "I found people who had been wiped out by burglars, and it wasn't just one or two, or one gang. There were obviously a great number operating."

Aleo, a short sandy-haired man, resolved to do something. He typed out a letter to his neighbors, duplicated 1,500 copies, and laboriously hand-delivered them.

"My name is Harry Aleo..." the letter began. "I am writing...regarding a very serious problem. I refer to the unbelievably large number of burglaries occurring in our district."

Aleo went on to explain how people must help themselves, and be alert for strangers. The response

amazed him still further. He wrote another letter and distributed it, saying the situation was more serious than he thought.

He told his neighbors the police were too short-handed to be solely relied upon. They must all become "nosey" neighbors. And he suggested volunteer block patrols. Finally, he called a meeting at the West Portal Library for last night.

The turnout staggered not only Aleo, but the police brass who showed up. "This is not a high-crime area, but it sure as heck looks like it to me," the pleased Aleo joked.

More than 350 persons jammed the library. Many latecomers had to be turned away.

They heard Capt. Edward Laherty of Taraval Station tell how brazen the burglars were becoming. Despite that, the average day watch consisted of only 27 officers to patrol 11 square miles.

Lt. Frank Jordon from the chief's office explained that there were more than 16,700 burglaries throughout The City in the first nine months of this year. Only 653 of those took place in the Taraval district, he said.

He told the attentive, but frustrated, homeowners how they could prevent more than 85 per cent of "opportunity" burglaries by improving locks, window fastenings and other measures.

The residents discussed hiring private policemen, and enthusiastically endorsed the idea of contributing \$2 or \$3 a month to an anti-burglary fund.

As the meeting ended two hours later, they stood and clapped and cheered Aleo, the man who had brought them out of their apathy.

"They obviously feel they have had enough and now they want to do something about it," Lt. Jordon said. "I expect the feeling to spread citywide before too long."

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