

Crime Watch keeps neighborhoods safe



In her own words, Carmen Caldwell's involvement with "Citizens' Crime Watch" goes back more than a quarter-century.

"It really started for me when crime had suddenly become such a serious problem in Hialeah," she told a meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee at Hammocks Police District last week.

Her comments drew gasps from the audience when she referred to the early 80s when the Mariel boatlift "brought 120,000 good citizens to this country and about 5,000 bad apples. And at that time, where I lived in Hialeah, there was only one police officer who spoke Spanish!"

Ms. Caldwell went on to describe how she helped form a network of neighbors, asking them to stay in touch with each other, encouraging them to "watch" for suspicious actions, information that she could then pass on from so many Spanish-speaking residents to police to improve security awareness.

In 2003, she became Executive Director of the Crime Watch Agency non-profit crime prevention program which today she estimates involves well over one million people who form the individual neighborhood networks to keep police abreast of suspicious activities that may involve criminal intent.

She estimates up to 30,000 Crime Watch groups active throughout Miami-Dade County today, a figure hard to determine since no data base recorded such information until she headed the program. "Those figures are hard to pin down," she said. "A neighborhood Crime Watch can

involve a small group of people or as many as several hundred."

There's much more to the effort than peering out a window to watch a local streetscape.

Crime prevention methods are reviewed regularly in Crime Watch meetings, as well as Homeland Security details and actions neighbors should take during natural disasters, such as the annual hurricane season.

Over the years, she has lost count of the number of training sessions and Crime Watch neighborhoods she has organized, plus seminars and conference appearances that have taken her to Paraguay and Chile in recent years.

With Ms. Caldwell attending four meetings per week and running the Crime Watch office with only one assistant, writing a newspaper column and promoting security through organization of new Crime Watch neighborhoods, we guess that she is more than a likely candidate for "Busiest Person in Town" — and well due recognition for helping keep our communities safe. As CAC Chairperson Frank Irizarry put it: "She puts her soul into the effort."

Any resident who wants to organize such a program can do so with guidance from her office at 305-470-1670 or by going online at <www.CitizensCrimewatch.com>.

Concerns expressed in July about noise, testing, and safety at Kendall-Tamiami Executive Airport will be aired at a special "Town Hall" meeting on Monday, Aug. 18, at 7 p.m. in The Crossings' Clubhouse Galleria, 11578 S.W. 132nd Avenue. Credit Miles Moss, president of Kendall Federation of Homeowners Associations, with getting action from the county Aviation Department to get the mid-summer community forum scheduled before another summertime month rolls by — even before he departed on his own overseas vacation on July 28. As a key spokesman

for Kendall community affairs, he will no doubt be back in time for the long-overdue session when residents can seek answers directly from those who run the airport affairs.

Baptist Hospital wants it made clear that road development in West Kendall, including six-laning of Kendall Drive, is not the reason for any delay in construction of its new 130-bed hospital. "We are proceeding to obtain all permitting in advance of a planned early fall groundbreaking which now appears likely by mid-September," says Jo Baxter, a vice president for Baptist Health Systems after reviewing our July 22 story that indicated roadwork by General Growth Properties to access the site could hold up the start of construction. Ms. Baxter said an announcement for a targeted Saturday groundbreaking event is in the works, possibly for a ceremonial hospital and community VIP shovel-wielding event in September.

A second postscript to that story: On July 30, an email from Nicole C. O'Connor, Director of Public Affairs for General Growth Properties, related: "Mark DeCapri, senior director for GGP said "At the present time we are evaluating our current plans and working with Miami-Dade County. We are in constant communication with retailers and I can tell you they are extremely interested in this project and this was exemplified at the International Council of Shopping Center (ICSC) convention in May." Mr. DeCapri's name was misspelled "DeCaprio" in the original story, and we regret the error.

While not generally publicized, one of Miami-Dade Fire Rescue's more intriguing displays is offered at A. D. Barnes Park in its Nature Center that features a reptilian exhibit and is home of the MFD's Anti-Venom Unit collection. Barnes Park is also judged as one of the best places to see tropical birdlife, according to ratings of the National

Audubon Society. The oasis-like greenery between S.W. 72nd and 67th Avenues is due for improvements in the near future, according to park folks.

Nice to read about the Steve Cohens of Bonita Lakes volunteering their time to help the disabled connect with trained service dogs, right after a national study ranked Fort Lauderdale-Miami as a low-est among 50 major U.S. cities and areas whose residents (over 16 years) perform volunteer services. Major reason as given by non-profit organization officials for the low count is a rapid turnover of volunteer servers within a year or less of pledging assistance. Miami Children's Hospital, which will open a new West Kendall Clinic at London Square shortly, reports a 600-member volunteer force but adds that it must hold orientations bi-monthly to keep up with its drop-out rate.

Rosy Pastrana, Deputy Supervisor for Elections, making the rounds in Kendall last week to demonstrate the new "paper trail" machines that will begin recording early primary voting August 11-24 at West Kendall Regional Library, 10201 Hammocks Boulevard; Coral Reef Library, 9211 S.W. 152nd Street; and Kendall Branch Library, 9101 S.W. 97th Avenue. Weekday hours Aug. 11-15 are 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Saturday, Aug. 16, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Sunday, Aug. 17, 1-5 p.m. Be advised, however, that weekday hours change Aug. 18-22 to 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. but stay the same Aug. 23: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and Aug. 24, 1-5 p.m.

Thought of the Day:

I never cease being dumbfounded by the unbelievable things people believe.

— Leo Rosten

Richard Yager contributed to this column.

Got any tips? Contact me at 305-669-7355, ext. 249, or send e-mail to <Michael@communitynewspapers.com>.

Kendall Gazette

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