

FishHawk Ranch Crime Prevention Meeting, February 2, 2009

For those who were unable to attend the meeting presented by Hillsborough County Sheriff's Department on crime prevention, this summarizes the key points. Over 100 FishHawk residents attended this meeting, indicative of the fact that we have an involved, caring community of residents in FishHawk Ranch.

The Sheriff's Department again reiterated that we **do not** have a "gang problem" or gang presence in FishHawk. What we do have are a lot of teenagers and sometimes outside "bad guys" who look for and commit crimes of opportunity. This includes car break-ins, home break-ins, and thefts from open garages. How can we minimize these crimes of opportunity?

- Keep parked cars locked, with valuables out of sight. The #1 attraction for car break-ins currently is theft of GPS units that are left in clear view on the dashboard.
- Keep garage doors closed.
- Do not open your door for strangers; teach your children not to open the door for strangers.
- If you live alone, when responding to a knock at your door, shout something like "I'll get it Bob" so the person outside the door will think there is a man in the house. Keep a pair of men's work boots or something similar in sight at your front door to give the appearance that an adult man resides in your home.
- If you are away from home overnight, do not leave just one light on - leave multiple lights on, in different rooms in the house.
- When walking or jogging, be attentive. DO NOT talk on your cell phone while walking or jogging. Be alert to what is going on around you.
- When walking to and from your car in a parking lot, have your key in hand, walk with authority and purpose, and lock the door behind you when you get in.
- When driving on roads with multiple lanes of travel in the same direction, the left lane or the center lane is a safer lane of travel than the right lane. When stopped in the right lane at a traffic light or stop sign, it is easier for someone to try to open your passenger-side door and snatch a purse or even get in your vehicle than if you are in a center or left lane.
- If your car breaks down, stay in your car and call for assistance.
- If you see another car broken down or someone is trying to wave you down to ask for assistance, DO NOT STOP. Although this seems contrary to our basic humanitarian instinct to help one another, you are putting yourself in danger. You can help the stranded motorist by using your cell phone to call the authorities to report his/her location, but do not attempt to stop and offer personal assistance.
- If someone approaches you in a threatening manner, be prepared to yell as loudly as you can, "FIRE, FIRE, FIRE." If you yell "help" people tend to become frightened and run away for their own safety. A better way to draw attention to your situation and to get others to look and respond is to yell the word "fire."
- Door to Door Solicitation. FishHawk has "no soliciting" signs, however most of our roads are public roads and there is not much the Sheriff's office can do with complaints about soliciting. Gated communities, such as Phoebe Park, are private roads and solicitors can be arrested for trespass if they are reported to the Sheriff and if they refuse to leave upon request. The best way to discourage solicitors is simply to make it non-profitable for them to solicit in our neighborhood. If we all get in the habit of saying "this is a no soliciting neighborhood, please leave," they will realize Phoebe Park is not a profitable neighborhood for them to do business in, and they will go elsewhere.

In conclusion, what was stressed over and over again is that residents must be willing to get involved to keep our neighborhoods safe. If something doesn't look right, or feel right, pick up the phone and call the Sheriff's department. That is their job--to respond and check out the situation. It is our responsibility to assist them by calling. We are the eyes and ears that know first what is happening in our own neighborhoods. They want to hear from us.

In several Hillsborough communities a "Citizen's Patrol" unit has been established; the Sheriff's Department is willing to work with interested persons in formalizing a program in FishHawk, if enough

residents are interested. Within FishHawk Ranch, some villages have a "Neighborhood Watch" program in effect; at this time Phoebe Park does not. If you are interested in knowing more about this program, please contact our Phoebe Park Board of Directors. It takes all of us working together to keep Phoebe Park and FishHawk Ranch a safe and secure community.