



Engage-Serve-Represent

**Gang Awareness Meeting Notes
8-12-08**

Joyce Wisdom: The idea for this meeting came in April, with the shootings outside of El Nuevo Rodeo. It became clear that area business owners didn't know a lot of what was going on with gang activity in the area, so it was time for a meeting to discuss it. Some predicted that things would get worse this summer, but so far it hasn't been as bad as those predictions.

Officer Porras: The lower activity this summer is thanks in large part to actions the Police Department took in the 3rd Precinct starting last fall. Many important area gang members were put in jail and a lot of effort was put into enforcement.

As an introduction, he said he has been a cop for 15 years in Minneapolis, and is bilingual. This has proven to be a big asset for the neighborhood. He specializes in Latino gangs.

There has been lots of graffiti tagging on Lake Street, 31st, Bloomington, and other nearby areas. They believe a lot of that tagging is attributable to 3-4 juveniles who live in the neighborhood.

The Sureno 13 gang is the most common on Lake Street. There are different cliques operating below the Sureno 13 umbrella name. When the Vatos Locos gang starts coming into this area, that's when assaults and drive-bys happen. The gangs use tattoos and clothing to identify themselves. Sureno 13 dresses in light or dark blue, with LA Dodgers baseball caps, and blue belts with silver buckles. Any of this clothing by itself, however, is not enough to definitely identify a person as belonging to the gang.

Tim Springer: Is there any particular size of a group to look out for as indicating they're in a gang?

Office Porras: Not really. It depends on a lot of things, and gang members don't always hang out with their gang, sometimes it will just be other friends or family.

Office Porras: Police have seen some gang merchandise on sale on Lake Street. They've spoken with a business owner in Lake Plaza about selling clothing that says Sureno 13 on it, and having other clothing favored by gangs. During Cinco de Mayo, they photographed a vendor selling Sureno 13 clothing as well as plaid shirts with the colors of many different gangs.

Gary Schiff: Requests that the police follow up with him about the merchandise they photographed. He signs off on street closing permits and can refuse to do it if issues like this aren't addressed adequately.

John Reed: In general, let police know what you see. Call 911 with a description if there is suspicious activity going on. Cover up graffiti ASAP and report it.

Office Porras: Next year, many gang members in jail now will be released. They've been able to get messages out through communication with others. The gangs here started with low-level activity, and as the gangs got older, they grew more sophisticated, turned to business harassment, and do more drug dealing.

Becky George: Do the current economic trends affect how many people join gangs?

Officer Porras: In his estimation, not really. People join gangs because they're poor, and that's not as dependent on fluctuations in the economy.

Joyce Wisdom: How do we repeat efforts like what happened in the fall, to keep activity low?

Office Porras: Community members need to keep calling on issues that they observe.

Lieutenant Ostland: The police summarize the calls they get each week, and assign cars based on the reports. If there are unreported issues, the police won't know, and assume the cars are more needed elsewhere.

Office Porras: The definition of a gang is a group of the 3 or more people who identify themselves by colors and engage in criminal activity. Sureno membership is estimated at 500 here. They use a 10 point system for determining gang membership of an individual. Such things as admitting to membership, having gang tattoos, being observed with known gang members, corresponding with known gang members, etc. Anyone who meets 3 of these criteria goes into the Metro Gang Strike Force database. The phone number for the strike force is 651-917-4800. They can be called for questions or updates like how large the current database is.

Gary Schiff: Have the police used a new state statute that allows them to trespass gang members from an entire neighborhood?

Lieutenant Ostlund: Was not aware of this statute before. The question they'd need to know before using it is how to know who they could use it on. They'll look into this statute more and follow up after the meeting.

Joyce Wisdom: Can we expect to see more beat cops in the area?

Gary Schiff: Not right now. Beat cops are good for visibility, not good for responding to 911 calls. The priority now is to decrease the 911 call response time. After addressing that, they may be able to look into more beat cops.

Becky George: Should we be concerned that police attention will divert to the Republican convention at the beginning of September, so that less focus would be on gangs during that time?

Lieutenant Ostlund: The minimum staffing requirements for Minneapolis neighborhoods hasn't changed, and they'll be fulfilling those requirements. A lot of police will be putting in 12 hour days during that period of time.

Tim Springer: What gangs are most active now, where do they work, and what do they do?

Office Porras: On Lake Street, the biggest battle is over drug consumers. The Surenos control the area currently. Their biggest activities are drug dealing, prostitution, and gun trafficking. Vatos Locos are in Northeast Minneapolis and Richfield, and can use those two different geographies to squeeze onto Lake. Their biggest activity is gun trafficking, and they also deal in drugs and robberies. The Latin Kings are on Pillsbury in the 5th Precinct. They're very family-oriented so hard to penetrate.

For non-Hispanic gangs, the Bloods are the biggest, but have been disorganized lately and not as out-front as before. For Somali gangs, the biggest growth area has been Cedar-Riverside.

Vatos Locos colors are black & gray/white/silver. They use Oakland Raiders caps. Latin Kings colors are black & gold.

Tim Springer: Some people have been attacked in the Greenway recently. When are innocent people targeted?

Lieutenant Ostlund: Women are usually "sexed-in" or "beat-in" before joining a gang. For men, it's usually stealing cars, robbery, or assault. So any innocent person going by that person looking to perform an assault will be the unlucky one targeted. It's important to be aware of your surroundings, especially the number of people around and the amount of lighting in the area at night. Always call 911 to report an incident, and call 311 to report something that looked suspicious but wasn't a crime.

John Reed: The bad people in the area know Latinos don't report crime as much as others, so they are targeted. They're working on educating Latinos how to be safer and when to call 911. These efforts do seem to be paying off with more reports from area Latinos.

Pay attention to specific characteristics of the people you're reporting when you call 911 or 311. The people you're reporting will likely change location from the time you call so police need to know what to look for.

Tim Springer: Every day, volunteers sweep broken glass off the Greenway and report where they swept to him, along with other incidents. He sends that to the police so they know where the action areas are.

John Reed: You can call the strike force at 651-917-4800 for information on any specific person if you're worried about them being in a gang. They won't use your call to get anyone in trouble. They will tell you if a family member or a person he or she hangs out with are listed in the gang database.