

RATING THE POLICE: Southwest part of city feeling safe and satisfied

Southwest part of city most positive about police work

By Jennifer Rios

Originally published 10:16 p.m., June 26, 2011

Updated 10:49 p.m., June 26, 2011

SAN ANGELO, Texas — Southwest part of city most positive about police work

By Jennifer Rios

jrios@gosanangelo.com 325-659-8262

Residents in southwest San Angelo are less concerned about burglaries or drug-related crime than residents in other areas of town.

They seem not to worry about criminals attacking them, breaking into their cars or robbing them. When they experience crime, they don't think twice about calling police.

The San Angelo Police Department received its highest marks and most positive feedback from the Beat 30 — the southwest area of the city extending to Lake Nasworthy and including College Hills and Southland. Residents there showed little fear of crime and reported high levels of satisfaction with officers and with the department as a whole, according to a police satisfaction survey conducted by Angelo State University.

Police administrators worked with ASU's Community Wellness, Engagement and Development program to assess what San Angelo wanted from the department. Now the goal is to analyze those figures and figure out how to apply them.

Sharalee Pierce, a Bentwood resident who completed the online survey, believes her neighborhood is for the most part crime free. Wednesday morning she saw a police car in the neighborhood, but other than regular patrols, she said, officers are rarely seen in the area.

A theft — checks missing from a package in her mailbox — that occurred two years ago was one of the last formal interactions she had with police. An officer arrived within 20 minutes to explain what she needed to do next.

"It was comforting to know even in a minor situation like that there was someone concerned, compassionate and informative," she said.

Another face-to-face meeting with police, after a hit-and-run involving her niece's car, also ended well. Even though officers couldn't locate the other driver, Pierce said their

attitude was respectful and responsive.

"And that's all we can ask for," she said.

Lt. Ed Kading, who serves part of Beat 30, agrees that residents seem to be aware of their surroundings.

"Our crime numbers out there are lower than in some other areas in town," he said. "We do have extensive patrol out there."

Officers focus on areas such as Southland, Kading said, which are designed compactly and have no streetlights. Since alleys allow access to garages, police patrol those passages more than streets and regularly ask residents to close garage doors they see open.

"The citizens are very cooperative about being a good witness, if you will," Kading said. "They're very aware of what's going on in their neighborhood."

A lot of the homes advertise their use of home security systems with signs in their yard or stickers on their doors. They also typically have lived in the area for years, know their neighbors and recognize suspicious activity, Kading said.

It's also an area that has people, including Pierce, with the time and motivation to volunteer for civic groups.

In the early 1990s, Pierce completed the Citizen's Police Academy — a program that teaches residents about different police divisions — and highly recommends the session.

"It's important for us citizens to become aware of what our officers are doing," she said, "and to support them in every way we can and respect them for what they do on a daily basis."

Compared with other areas in San Angelo, residents in Beat 30 are more concerned about gang violence, violent crime and panhandling, according to the survey. As a group they believe in stricter punishment by the courts as a crime prevention technique.

Casey Jones, one of the ASU data specialists who worked on the survey, recommended holding focus groups in neighborhoods, Kading said. The idea of more formalized meetings, possibly facilitated by ASU's WED center, to address fears and concerns, is a good one, he said.

"These numbers give me an idea or gauge on the citizens' fear of crime," he said. "I can take those crimes and look at public safety as it relates to civic fears."

After a meeting with ASU, Police Chief Tim Vasquez asked lieutenants to brainstorm ideas on how to react to the survey results.

Kading said they plan to present ideas to administrators in the coming weeks.

"The most exciting thing about the survey is we're actually committed to doing something with it," he said. "We can actually carry it down the road. We can react to

the survey and do more later on."

This story is the second in a series about the results of a May survey analyzing public attitude toward services provided by the San Angelo Police Department.



© 2011 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online