



KCPD, roll call at Westside CAN Center

BY JOE ARCE AND JERRY LAMARTINA

Westside residents have had enough of crime in the neighborhood, they want the Kansas City Police Department (KCPD) to do more to prevent it.

"What we're planning to do in our household is to have cameras and alarms, because of a series of break-ins that have been happening lately," a Westside resident told Kansas City Hispanic News. This resident has lived on the Westside for more than two decades and preferred not to be identified.

Roughly 25 residents attended a "roll call" breakfast meeting of KCPD officers and residents last week at the Westside Community Action Network (CAN) Center for an ongoing conversation about how police and residents can work together to reduce crime.

"We have had a shoot-out behind our house – 20 shots," the resident. "I called the assault squad with some information."

According to the resident, there have been drug issues within the community for years.

Major Michael Wood, commander of the KCPD's Central Patrol Division, attended the meeting and emphasized that he saw the CAN Center and residents as "partners to make this area as safe and friendly and convenient (as possible) to everybody in the neighborhood."

"We're part of this community," Wood told Hispanic News. "We're not an adversary to anybody. We're here to help people, and that's our main mission."

Open communication is key to police and the communities they serve developing mutual trust as a first step to keeping neighborhoods safe, Wood said.

"It's important that our officers understand the different cultures (in the neighborhoods they serve)," Wood said. "Some people are going to come into this community and ... they're leery of the police because of what they've experienced in their lifetime. We have to recognize that and address how we move forward accordingly, and a big part of that is the communication and the contacts that are created here in the CAN Center, and with the officers that are assigned here, the relationships that they have built within this community. That's where the trust starts."

Jorge Coromac, the CAN Center's director, said the roll call meetings were designed "to always have a learning opportunity for the workers and the police department."

"For the police officers, especially the new police officers, who come into Kansas City, it's an opportunity for them to understand what's happening in that neighborhood," Coromac said. "It's also for the day-labor workers to understand what the new regulations are and what is important for them to do to follow the law."

Homelessness on the Westside is a problem that has "been happening traditionally here for many, many years," he said.

"There are two things (people) have to understand," Coromac said. "One is the homeless people who unfortunately are having mental issues, mental disease, and the other is day laborers who are here ready to work and to serve the community. We partner with the COMBAT program in Jackson County. It provides many services in the area, including helping those with mental illness. ... We try to refer and encourage people to go in (for mental health services when needed)."

The resident pointed to "issues in the neighborhoods: gangs, drugs, break-ins and shootings."

"Police call time and response time, and cooperation among departments, have been an issue," the resident said. "Police are in the CAN Center a lot, but we need them out in the community. Listen to the people, and when they're giving you information, I don't know what kind of follow-through happens. And also being more proactive with more and more patrols. I don't see a whole lot of patrols going on, 'cause I keep my eyes open. From the community standpoint, we need people to call 911 or the non-emergency number. If you see something suspicious, trust your eyes. And then, know your neighbors. Take time to introduce yourself to your neighbors."

The resident expressed frustration but gave the police constructive criticism.

"I want to make it clear: I support the police department," the resident said. "I think that what they do is a very dangerous job. It's sometimes a very unforgiving job. They get a lot of criticism, but they don't get a lot of credit. I'm a huge supporter of the police department. But we have issues, and we want the police to be more proactive. ... I'm not moving."

