

## **CRIME CUT IN APARTMENT PROGRAM / LACEY POLICE SAY CRIME LOWERED BY NEW LANDSCAPING, TRAINING, TENANT SCREENING**

*[Thurston County Edition]*

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### **Document Text**

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Mandy Brearley walked her 2-year-old son across the play yard of Surrey Lane apartments without a care this week.

It's something she said she didn't do nine months ago without first calling her mother in the apartment across the street and asking her to come meet them.

But Surrey Lane feels safer than it did when she moved in, Brearley said.

That's because it is, Lacey crime prevention officer Dave Campbell said.

Surrey Lane is one of 43 apartment complexes - mostly in Lacey - participating in the police department's Crime Reduction Multi-Housing Program.

In most of the complexes, the manager training, new landscaping and tenant screening has meant fewer drugs, fights and break-ins, and safer, happier tenants, Campbell said.

And that means police can spend less time going to apartment buildings and more time dealing with other crime.

To prompt more complexes to join or participate more fully, the Lacey Police Department will ask the city this summer to adopt an ordinance imposing an annual fee per apartment unit. That fee - possibly \$10 - could be waived if a complex participates fully in the program.

At some complexes, owners are only \$400 or \$500 away from getting their apartments fully up to speed, but they see no reason to make that final investment, Campbell said.

Or they don't want to check potential tenants' criminal histories because it makes it harder to fill the apartments.

"You want to do the best for the residents and you want to help the managers out, but it comes down to one thing - the money," Campbell said. "Their pocketbooks are the only thing I can tug on to make it happen."

Lacey City Councilwoman Earlyse Swift said she looks forward to Campbell's proposal.

"From a public policy perspective, we have to weigh any time we add cost to anybody, but our job is to have a safe community," Swift said. "And if this will bring better safety, then we have to consider it."

The program, which began in March 1997, has three levels. In the first, it trains apartment managers about landlord and tenant rights and how to recognize criminal activity, such as the warning signs of gang affiliation or the smell of clandestine drug labs.

In the second level, it teaches landscaping for safety - putting in peepholes, improving lighting and planting prickly bushes in front of windows to deter thieves from crawling through them.

At the highest level, managers agree to screen all tenants' criminal histories and ask them to sign contracts that they'll be crime-free while living there.

Campbell holds monthly meetings with all apartment managers, and police visit the participating complexes at least

monthly to check on how things are going.

"It's getting better," Campbell said.

A comparison of the first three months of 1997 and the first three months of 1998 at six of the 43 participating properties found that two had big decreases in crime, two had slight decreases and two had increases.

Surrey Lane is one of the success stories.

Thurston County Housing Authority owns the property, and Executive Director Chris Lowell said the change has been the result of efforts by the authority, the police, the youth advocacy group Together! and area property owners.

"(We) have worked so hard to clean up that strip of Ruddell Road, and we feel it's really working," Lowell said.

Resident Brandy Damis, like Brearley, used to worry for her children's safety.

The complex was noisy and a flow of strange cars visited certain apartments during all hours of the day and night. She knew that some residents were using methamphetamine.

"My kids were only allowed in a certain area, and now I let them go anywhere" in the complex, she said. "I feel safe here."

On the other hand, figures suggest the program hasn't had much effect at College Point apartments, where police responses increased in the first three months of this year compared with the same period last year. Still, Lauren Brooks, who's been manager at College Point for about a month, said she thinks the program is working.

It might be too early to see the results, Campbell said. Experts from Tacoma who run a drug house elimination program told him not to check the results for at least two years because it takes time to weed out the problems, he said.

And an increase in police responses doesn't necessarily mean an increase in problems. Lorie Herlea, assistant manager at College Glen apartments off College Street, said that since she's gotten to know police, she's more likely to call them about things that might have gone unreported before.

Owners and managers both have to make big commitments to rid their buildings of crime, Campbell said. "It means having empty units, which goes against what a lot of (owners) believe in," he said.

When Lacey developer Tri Vo took over the former Brandonwood Apartments - now called Victorian Place - on Ruddell Road, it took him many months to fill the units.

Vo could have filled the place immediately, but he was careful about screening tenants and turned down a lot of people, Campbell said.

But Vo held out, and like many of the owners and managers who participate in the program, he now has safer buildings that are sources of tenant and community pride.

"We're not going to stop all crime, we're not going to save the world, yadda, yadda," Campbell said, "But we certainly can make it a lot better."

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**[Illustration]**

COLOR PHOTO / Janet Jensen/The News Tribune: Chris Gill, 7, left; his brother Jesse Gill, 7, on slide; Alex Foss, 5, sitting; and Tiffany Damis, 4, play at the Surrey Lane apartment complex where they live. CHART / Derrik Quenzer; The News Tribune: Lacey Apartment Crime (see microfilm)

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**Abstract** (Document Summary)

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