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Neighborhood Watch

The idea of a neighborhood watch program around Aitkin County Lakes has been discussed at different times for many years. Perhaps the idea that there would be a large time commitment from participants, questions about the effectiveness of such programs or other unknown factors have prevented it from happening. Establishing a neighborhood watch program does not have to involve a huge time commitment and studies have shown that neighborhoods with low crime rates and/or decreases in home burglaries often have neighborhood watch programs.

Property crimes, such as burglaries, thefts and vandalism are crimes of opportunity. The trend away from personal contact in the neighborhood and the decrease in time that the families spend at home are two reasons why communities are susceptible to crimes of opportunity. A neighborhood watch program can help build that sense of community and engage residents to take notice of what is happening in their neighborhood. Law enforcement would rather work with citizens to keep their neighborhoods safe than spend time and resources investigating crime after it occurs.

When one thinks of a neighborhood watch program it undoubtedly conjures up thoughts of citizen patrols, block captains, and a myriad of other thoughts. In reality it may be as simple as getting to know your neighbors. Yes, it can be that simple. It can simply be engaging you to notice suspicious activities and report them to each other and to law enforcement.

The prevention of crime – particularly crime involving residential neighborhoods – is a responsibility that must be shared equally by law enforcement and citizens. Implicit in the motto, “To Protect and Serve”, is the concept of cooperation with the citizens. What can the citizens do to begin the process?

- Get to know your neighbors and the persons and vehicles that should be at their home or cabin.
- Know when someone should be at a particular home or cabin.
- Report suspicious activity such as:
 - Unusual noises: gunshots, screaming, breaking glass
 - Suspicious Persons: persons going door to door, loitering, or present at unusual times

- Suspicious Vehicles: parked or occupied in unusual locations or at unusual times, abandoned vehicles, out of place vehicles (i.e. service vehicles at night?)
- Describing Events: (who, what, where, when, and how?)
 - Describing what you saw
 - vehicles: make, model, color, and license number
 - persons: age, sex, race, height, weight, hair, facial features, etc
- When describing events write it down – memories play tricks on us

It would be a great start to begin doing what was described above. The most important aspect – getting to know your neighbors will likely be enjoyable and may lead to newfound friendships. More importantly, it will likely lead to a safer neighborhood. We are here to serve, but we do need the help. Please let me know if there is interest in developing the Neighborhood Watch program into something more.

“Working Together for a Better, Safer Aitkin County”