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Columbia Heights Police Department sees reduction in juvenile, adult crimes

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By building partnerships, the Columbia Heights Police Department is reaching out to youth and seeing a notable reduction in crime.

Police Chief Scott Nadeau, who joined Columbia Heights in April 2008, said the department has put a lot of time and attention into outreach to youth and youth accountability in the last three years.

According to Nadeau, juvenile arrests totaled 429 in 2008, 354 in 2009 and currently total 258 in 2010.

"We're approaching in just two years an almost 50 percent reduction in [juvenile] arrests. It's amazing," he said.

One successful program is Cops-N-Kids, which began in 2008. The Columbia Heights Police Department hosts weekly open gym time at the Hylander Center and the middle school during the school year. Nadeau expects the gate count of kids attending the program will exceed 3,000 this year.

Nadeau said the school district is doing a "fantastic" job seeking after-school opportunities, and the Columbia Heights Recreation Department also offers programming for youth and open gym time at the Hylander Center.

"That combination of factors - the more collaborative effort - that seems to be really paying some dividends for us," Nadeau said.

In addition to a police liaison at the high school, two more liaisons have been added to schools in Columbia Heights.

Through a grant, a police liaison was assigned to the middle school beginning in January 2008, after not having a liaison officer since 1992. The grant expired after two years, so now the liaison officer is funded by the school district and the city.

In December 2009, the Columbia Heights City Council unanimously authorized the mayor and police chief to enter into a contract with Northeast Metro School District 916 for a liaison officer at Metro Heights Academy, 3989 Central Ave. N.E. The contract will continue through June 30, 2013.

The police department also continues to teach the DARE program at Immaculate Conception and District 13 elementary schools in Columbia Heights. Next year the department will begin teaching DARE at North Park, a District 13 elementary school in Fridley. The Fridley Police Department taught DARE at North Park before budget cuts.

In January or February, Columbia Height Police will start an anti-bullying pilot initiative at

Highland Elementary, which could expand to the other District 13 elementary schools.

In addition, the police department is continuing to work on juvenile issues related to truancy and curfew types of offenses.

Nadeau said there has been about a 22 percent drop in violent crime since 2008, and overall crime is down 30 percent from 2008.

Livability crimes, such as vandalism, robberies and DWIs, have dropped about 20 percent from 2008 to 2009, and that drop is continuing from 2009 to 2010, Nadeau said.

"Crime is down in other communities as well - we need to be cognizant of that - but crime is going down at a rate that's significantly more than in other communities, areas and regions."

To achieve lower crime levels overall, Nadeau said the police department has been identifying trends, patterns and "hot spots" to address problems early in the community before they escalate into bigger problems.

In August 2009, the City Council adopted an ordinance that implemented a repeat nuisance call service fee, which targets properties that generate continuous calls for service related to narcotics use or loud parties, for example.

Nadeau said the ordinance has resulted in some success stories. One landlord entered into a crime mitigation plan with the police department, and monthly calls for service dropped from the high 20s to about two calls.

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