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A community against crime

Neighbors in Elk Grove join forces

By Garance Burke -- Bee Staff Writer

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Nine years ago, Michael and Teresa Jones founded Laguna Greens Neighborhood Watch, hoping to transform their new housing development from a place to sleep to a neighborhood where families grow up together.

Tuesday, as kids played basketball and neighbors chatted under the ornamental pear trees in Jeannie Womack Park, they could finally take stock of their efforts.

The group has been so successful at involving neighbors in community policing that it has incorporated as a nonprofit and has its own Web site. The group also plans to start a scholarship fund. Last week, the couple hosted the group's annual barbecue in the park, which has become a model for Elk Grove's



Michael Jones, president of the Laguna Greens Neighborhood Watch, visits with neighbors during a party Tuesday for National Night Out.

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Sacramento Bee/Anne Chadwick Williams

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Home court advantage
At Ruthie Bolton's house, three pairs of size-12 Dada brand athletic shoes are placed just inside the front door, neat and tidy and ready to go.

Practicing emergency,
plane lands upside down
RANCHO MURIETA - A flight instructor and his student, who were practicing what to do in case of engine failure, experienced the real thing Wednesday morning at Rancho Murieta Airport, officials said.

Waters recede, but not the fears
By Monday, the worst was over.

Residents mixed on park name decision
Should the Elk Grove Community Services

National Night Out.

"When I was growing up, no matter what race you were, you became my auntie or my uncle. If someone died, we took food to their house," said Teresa Jones, who said her mixed Filipino and Mexican heritage taught her to look across racial differences to see community.

"We want everyone we know to feel safe and to look out for each other."

Tuesday night, 22 neighborhoods in Elk Grove held similar festivities for National Night Out, the annual event that gets residents out of their homes to think through strategies for community safety.

Because Laguna Greens Neighborhood Watch has nonprofit status, it funds such events through tax-deductible donations it can solicit from grocery stores and groups like the United Way. Participants said the group also gives neighbors a clear structure to channel their efforts.

"Michael has the whole neighborhood doing different jobs, and people do like having responsibilities," said Assistant Police Chief Ed Kelly. "He's been the model to help us show other people how to get going."

Teresa Jones said the group's budget of \$1,800 was enough to buy the 80 hot links, bratwurst and low-fat beef sausages she barbecued for the 70 people milling around the park.

Tuesday's event was particularly poignant for Elk Grove residents, who found it difficult to digest the news that vandals had sprayed swastikas and racist epithets on homes and cars in east Elk Grove the previous night.

Public officials stopped by to encourage the group to keep watching out for one another.

"We all kind of slipped for a while - everybody got really busy and forgot how to be together," said Mayor Sophia Scherman. "But there's nothing but love and respect here, and those are the things that will make any community grow."

As new acquaintances chatted about baseball and football, the aroma of cut cantaloupe drifted through the air.

"When you see your neighbors as people who live the way you do, you'll be more likely to keep in contact," said Maxine Richey, a retired environmental scientist who lives on Castlegrove Avenue.

Kids wearing twisted balloon hats napped in strollers as parents tied trash bags to trees and talked about how to get together more frequently.

"I've been here for five years, and after two years I met my neighbor," said Luis Ballesteros, who grew up in Nayarit, Mexico. "It feels strange, because I



District name a park after Michael Ramirez, the 13-year-old boy who was killed in a hit-and-run accident in May?

Nan Mahon: Friends for life

The excitement of graduation from Morgantown High School was still fresh when Ray Gosovich and Don Knotts left West Virginia and headed for New York.

Community Watch: Visibility can be problem for drivers turning onto Grant Line

Elk Grove resident Greg Burghardt says the intersection of Sheldon and Grant Line roads has always been a problem.

Volunteers sought to plant 300 trees

Volunteers are sought to help plant more than 300 acorns and native tree seedlings along the Laguna Creek Parkway in Elk Grove.

Museum open on Saturday The Elk Grove Hotel and Stage Stop Museum will be open from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday.

Film on corporations The Elk Grove Peace and Justice Forum will feature the documentary "The Corporations" at 7 p.m. Monday at Elk Grove Methodist Church, 8986 Elk Grove Blvd.

Club calendar

came from a different country that's more social. But everyone has different cultures and different ethics, especially in California."

Ballesteros and his wife, Maria, said particularly with recent events, they were hesitant to let their two boys play in the park or in the front yard. But with an event like National Night Out, it felt safe enough to mingle with new acquaintances.

Brenda Pfau sat next to Maria, watching her son Brock climb the jungle gym.

"My sons get to know other kids through this, and they feel like they belong when they have a feeling of connection to people here," Pfau said.

But for some, the party was a glimpse into a collective experience still to be constructed.

"Where I live, you just see your neighbors when they leave in the morning," said Robert Thomas, a longtime friend of the Joneses who lives in the Pocket area. "But to have a good neighbor you gotta be a good neighbor."

About the Writer

The Bee's Garance Burke can be reached at (916) 478-2641 or gburke@sacbee.com.

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Barbara Bello, foreground, and Teresa Bello, 12, show their patriotism in their hair.

Sacramento Bee/Anne Chadwick Williams



Casey Walsh, 4, sports a balloon hat courtesy of Giggles the clown at Tuesday night's party thrown by Laguna Greens Neighborhood Watch.

Sacramento Bee/Anne Chadwick Williams

Courtney Morse, 8, left, and Emily Treichelt, 10, talk to Elk Grove firefighter William Fitch during the National Night Out party.



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