



Neighbors from the Fallbreeze Court Party take a curious look at the police's PT Cruiser during National Night Out held on Aug. 2. The Elk Grove police visited the neighborhood parties held throughout Elk Grove that night.

The eyes and ears of the community

By Cameron Macdonald
Citizen Staff Writer

Terri Fong raised her arms as if caught red-handed when Youth Officer Matt Sanchez and Elk Grove City Council member Rick Soares drove up in the police department's PT Cruiser with its lights flashing. She was dressed head to toe as a clown, complete with a flaming-red Afro wig.

Fong stood in the middle of West Neutra Court to greet Sanchez; surrounding her were more than 50 neighbors gathered for an ice cream social as part of the 22nd Annual National Night Out on Aug. 2. She is in one of more than 25 neighborhood watch groups that held block parties in Elk Grove, where neighbors met former strangers, along

Over 25 neighborhood
watch groups
party on
*National
Night-Out*

with discussing local crime prevention.

"A family that plays together, stays together - so that's what we think of ourselves - as a family - and now we feel more safe to play," Fong said about the party.

"Take Back the Night" was written on a large ban-

ner posted in a front yard in the Laguna West neighborhood.

"What we can do is grow a little bit more so everybody is watching everybody and taking care of everybody," Fong's neighbor, John Webb, said. "It's important

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NATIONAL NIGHT

Night

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ports of suspicious activities and to give away goods that promote the event. Wrapped coffee cups were also given as gifts to the neighborhood watch group coordinators.

The police's Crime Prevention Officer Denise Costello said that neighbors mainly questioned visiting officers about any new crime trends.

She said that the event is also important for connecting neighbors and embodying good neighborliness.

"The impact lasts more than a night," Costello said. "That one night has a bigger impact than the next 364 days of the year."

The *Citizen* traveled to four parties in the Laguna area that night in the police PT Cruiser with Sanchez, Soares and his wife, Carolyn.

Sanchez said that the event helps bridge neighbors and the police.

"It's about getting out there and getting to know people; letting them see us in a different light," Sanchez said about the police visits.

Soares said that he regularly rides along in a police patrol once a month to learn more about what is happening in his community.

The city council member said that the Night Out parties that he attended that night all enhanced Elk Grove.

"I'm so impressed with the spirit; the people spending quality time meeting their neighbors, which society doesn't seem to do much of," Soares said. "It's the spirit of what's Elk Grove is all about - neighbors working with neighbors; friendships were formed tonight and it just makes us that much better of a city."

The first party that the PT Cruiser visited was the Laguna Greens Neighborhood



Youth Officer Matt Sanchez stands with Terri Fong of West Neutra Court's neighborhood watch group during National Night Out on Aug. 2. Fong dressed as a clown as her group had an ice cream social to connect with other neighbors and discuss how to prevent crime.

Watch, Inc.'s party at Womack Park, where more than 50 people celebrated the group's decade of existence.

The Laguna Greens group's co-founder Michael Jones said that such a party helps connect neighbors, along with effectively reducing local crime.

"One thing that we all know for sure is that crime is down in our area," Jones said.

Jones' group recently notified the police about a large group of juveniles who were setting off firecrackers in Womack Park around 10 p.m. The police quickly came and disbursed the juveniles.

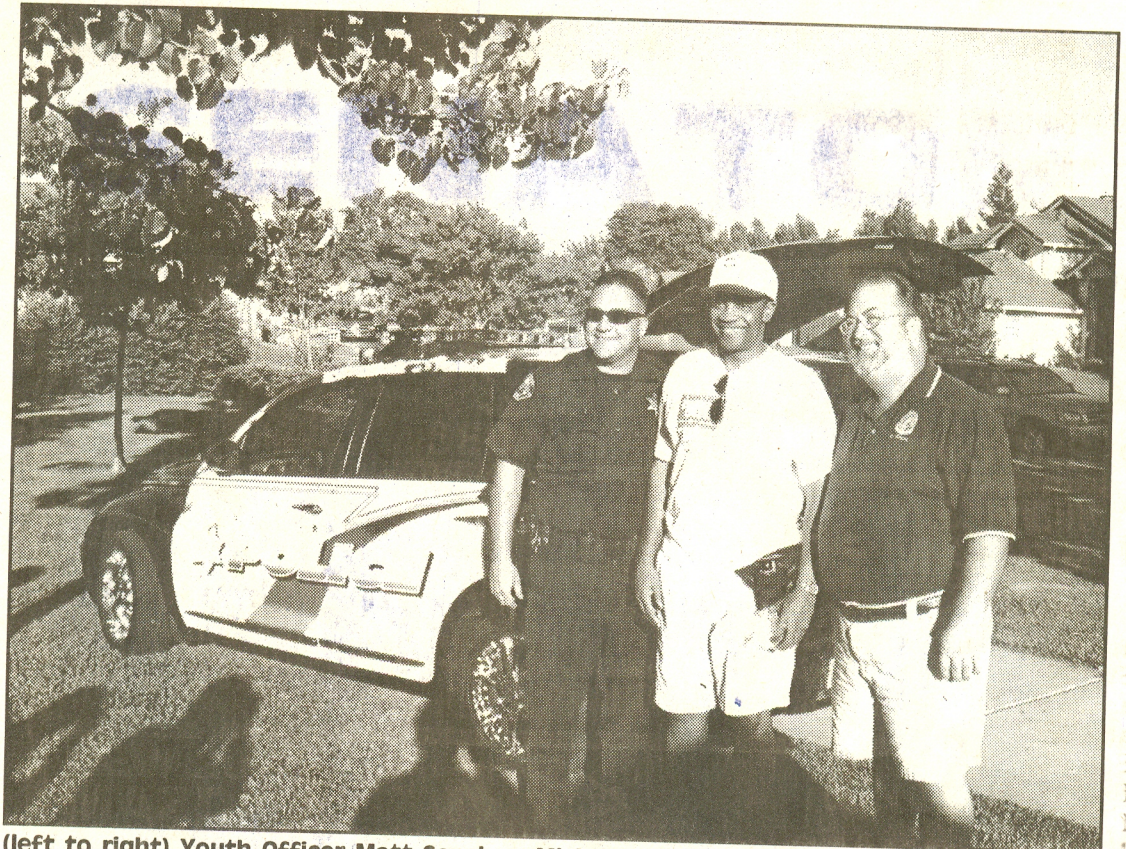
During the final party, Soares and Sanchez visited the kickoff event for a watch group on Cortino Way.

Two Elk Grove Fire Department trucks also came to the party, where many fascinated children studied them and enjoyed ringing the fire bell.

"We're here to answer any questions they have and to get

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STYLE



(left to right) Youth Officer Matt Sanchez, Michael Jones of Laguna Greens Neighborhood Watch, Inc., and City Council member Rick Soares poses for pictures by the Elk Grove police's PT Cruiser in Womack Park. Sanchez and Soares drove to National Night Out parties in the PT

Night

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- we know that our police officers are always busy, and I say that in a good way, but they're doing their jobs and we as citizens have to do our job to watch out for each other."

While eating ice cream served in a garage, Sanchez paused to watch neighborhood kids, both teenagers and those three-feet tall play baseball in the cul-de-sac, using hula hoops and plastic bats as bases. He said that activity is an example

of what a Night Out party does best.

"The parents feel comfortable and the kids feel comfortable and they have the opportunity to go and play out in front of their homes," he said.

As Sanchez later drove away, Fong led a few girls to cha-cha dance with her.

National Night Out is an event sponsored by the National

Association of Town Watch and is held the first Tuesday of every August. In a press release, the organization projected that more than 10,000 communities were to participate this year.

In Elk Grove, police officers visited the Night Out parties to answer questions, hear re

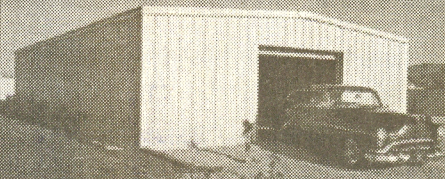
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OUT

to see everybody," Probationary Firefighter Jennifer O'Leary said.

At the Cortino Way party, the group's co-coordinator Steve Blanton said a few break-ins occurred in his neighborhood, along with items like an address sign getting stolen from his front yard.

During the Cortino Way party, a neighbor who wanted to be anonymous told the *Citizen* about a July 13 burglary of her house.

She said that during that early afternoon, she left her house to pick up pictures at Costco and came home to find the door to her garage open and a large bag containing her children's video game systems by a door.

"I didn't think much of it," the homeowner said. "I thought that (my children)

came from their dad's house." She then yelled to ask what her children were doing, when she heard someone run out the back door.

The stranger was a burglar who took all of her jewelry and fled on a bicycle stolen from her garage. Inside the mysterious bag were also her laptop and digital camera.

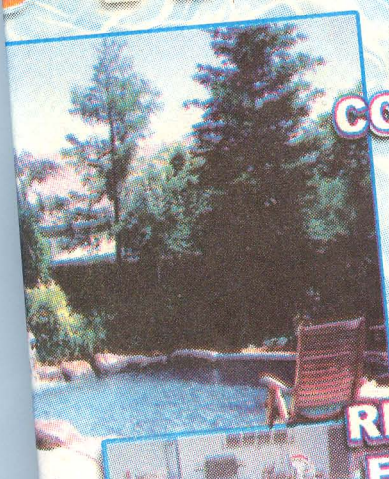
Her lawn care worker saw the suspect flee and reported to the police that it was a juvenile boy between 14 and 15 years old.

"Hopefully, we'll watch out for each other," she said. "Because this (burglary) happened in the middle of the day."

Soares said that he heard about the burglary.

"And this is the result of that," he said, pointing at the party.

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