

August 7 2007 Email

From the Desk of Commissioner Lance Rogers

Neighbors,

I want to update you on two incidents which occurred over the past 24 hours in our community. Please take a moment to read this email as it contains important public safety information.

This morning, the Lower Merion Police officer assigned to patrol our neighborhood spotted two suspects who were believed to have been involved in some recent burglaries/robberies in the area. The officer immediately called for backup and Lower Merion Police sealed off the neighborhood. The suspects were apprehended (with the help of Haverford Police) after they burglarized a home on Crest Road. Lower Merion Police Superintendent Joe Daly's report follows:

Today numerous officers from various units of the police department were deployed in the area. The beat officer observed two subjects matching the description. At that time the beat car and numerous other marked cars were assigned to strategic locations to contain the suspects. The area was then flooded with unmarked cars.

As the containment area was being searched the suspects broke into the home of [RESIDENT'S NAME REDACTED] in the 1500 block of Crest Road. [RESIDENT'S NAME REDACTED] was asleep in a second floor bedroom and awoken to find one of the suspects in the room.

The suspects fled and were immediately observed by Det. Charles Craig. Several more officers joined a brief foot pursuit which resulted in the immediate apprehension of one suspect. The second suspect disappeared in to the woods and was apprehended by officers from Haverford Township as he exited onto the platform of the Overbrook P & W station. Both subjects were positively identified by the victim.

One of the suspects is being very cooperative [and this should lead to the resolution of other unsolved crimes].

I will keep you posted on any additional information which becomes available about this incident. I want to thank the Lower Merion Police Department for the successful apprehension of these two dangerous criminals.

I also want to inform you of some disturbing news from other parts of our Township. Superintendent Daly's report concerning an apparent carjacking ring operating in our area follows:

At about 11:00 PM last evening (Sunday, August 5th) a family residing on Cynwyd Circle in Bala Cynwyd arrived back at their home from a trip to the Jersey Shore. The father entered his home through the rear door and came through the house to open the front door. His wife and daughter then came up on the porch carrying luggage and he was now back at the car. At this point two young black males approached him and demanded the keys to his car. The suspect that did all of the talking was armed with a silver plated handgun. During this brief encounter in an effort to intimidate the victim further, the armed suspect worked the action of the weapon and stated "Don't make me hurt you".

As this was occurring, the wife and daughter heard the suspect announce the robbery and that he had a gun. They immediately entered the house and contacted the police. The father didn't have his wallet and provided the suspect with his keys they both entered his BMW station wagon and drove away.

Officers converged on the area but the suspects had successfully fled the area. The vehicle was entered into NCIC and all surrounding jurisdictions were contacted.

It was determined that the family's route home was along major highways until they exited the Schuylkill Expressway at City Ave and then onto Presidential Blvd. The father reported that he became aware of a dark-colored Ford Crown Victoria or similar type vehicle following him after he passed Righters Ferry and Monument Road.

On August 1st we had a very similar incident in Wynnewood at the Wyndon Apartments. In that incident the victims had just arrived home from the airport, coming into the Township at 63rd Street and City Avenue, and were confronted in the parking lot. The crimes were almost identical in the manner in which they proceeded, including what was said to the victims in the course of the confrontation. The car taken in Wynnewood was an Infiniti SUV. While both the cars taken were higher-end cars, in neither case were they new models.

It is important that you understand that our neighborhood is only as safe as WE make it. Each of us bears responsibility for making our neighborhood as safe as it can be. Believe it or not, your actions do affect all of our safety.

Here's how you can do your part:

1) Report crime and/or suspicious activity! I know it sounds obvious but a recent dangerous trend is developing where residents are neglecting to report incidents of crime and/or suspicious activity. I'm aware of the following actual instances where crimes could have been avoided if residents had picked up the phone and called the police when they became aware of suspicious and/or criminal activity:

- A resident failed to call police after chasing two men out of his house who broke in while he was upstairs during the day (a nearby home was robbed that same day).
- A resident failed to call police after two men rang his doorbell and asked if they could cut his lawn and trim his hedges (the two did not have lawn care equipment and were on foot). After the resident agreed to pay them for these services, they said they needed to go home to get their gloves and would be back. The men never came back and the resident's next door neighbor's home was burglarized that day.
- Some residents along Greywall Lane failed to call police when they saw a man walking up and down the street trying doors. Later that day the Greywall home invasion occurred.
- Residents reported seeing a pack of kids in the neighborhood (near Haverford Road) that alarmed at least one resident who described them as besing "up to no good." A short time later another resident was attacked while walking home from the JCC.

These are just a few instances where a simple call to the police could have made all the difference in the world. The police have asked me to ask for you for your help - they want you to call when you see something that strikes you as suspicious. They can't be everywhere at once and need you help in reporting activity which needs to be investigated. You will not get in trouble for reporting something that turns out to be benign. Better to be safe than sorry. Remember the rule of thumb: "protect us all, make the call." If you feel funny about dialing 911, use the police's non-emergency line: 610-649-1000.

2) Install motion sensitive lighting at your house.

3) LOCK your car and house doors! An unlocked door is an invitation to would-be burglars and will only encourage criminals to prowl the area. By leaving your doors unlocked - you're not only putting your property in harm's way - you're putting all of our property and safety in jeopardy. Let's work together to take this simple step. If your neighbor is leaving doors unlocked - let them know it's placing all of us in danger.

4) Trim any shrubs away from windows. If your home borders a major street with a sidewalk - trim any shrubs blocking access to the sidewalk and anything which obscures a driver's line of sight.

5) If you feel you are being followed (as described in the carjacking instances above) do not drive home. If you have a mobile phone and are in the Township, dial 610-649-1000 (as dialing 911 may connect you to Philadelphia's emergency call center), report the situation to police and follow their instructions. If you do not have a mobile phone, stay in well-lit public areas and look for a police car, or, drive to the police station. Remember to take a second each time you get home to look around for suspicious activity before getting out of your car.

6) Take advantage of the training classes offered for Town Watch volunteers. These classes teach you how to recognize a problem before it becomes a problem. There is no requirement that you commit to Town Watch in order to take these classes. Should you chose to volunteer, Town Watch has no time requirements. You may volunteer to patrol as often as you like - or as little as once a year. Having more trained eyes out there (whether on patrol or not) will make our neighborhood safer.

These are easy to follow recommendations which will make our area safer. Talk to your neighbors about implementing these recommendations.

I want to also remind you that the Penn Wynne Public Safety Committee is hard at work reviewing various ideas to make our neighborhood safer. Last week we met with the director of Town Watch and next week we will meet with Police Superintendent Joe Daly. In the fall we will announce and implement recommendations designed to make our community as safe as it can be. Watch for announcements about the town hall regarding these recommendations. In the meantime, you can get updates on the committee's work on my website. Stop by frequently for continuous updates.

As F.D.R. observed, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." If we work together towards implementing these easy to follow recommendations and maintain a level-headed approach we'll be as safe as we can be. Just remember, we're all in this together. This is a great time to reach out to your neighbors to be sure they're up to date. Please encourage them to sign up for my email alert system. The more informed we are the safer we are. To sign up, email me at lance@lancerogers.com

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