

Public Co-Operation Heralds Success for Kenmore Crime Prevention Campaign

By V. A. MacDonald, Deputy Commissioner, Queensland Police Department
(Qld Branch Representative and National Executive A.C.P.C.)



One of the self-evident truths of police work, particularly in our modern society, is that no police force may operate effectively without the fullest co-operation of the community it serves.

Too often today, people tend to regard crime prevention and detection as the exclusive preserve of the police officer. It is, therefore, not unusual to find modern police forces labouring to overcome an ever-increasing spiral of criminal offences.

But in those areas where the private citizen joins with his local police officers in an effort to come to terms with the problems of criminal acts, it has been shown that the number of offences is reduced and the likelihood of the detection of offenders is greatly increased.

In recent months, senior officers of the Queensland Police Administration have dedicated themselves to popularising the police force and in creating a climate of greater co-operation between individual police officers and their immediate communities. This need for improved public relations has permeated into all levels of the Department and most police officers in Queensland today are intent on developing improved relations with their fellow citizens.

Although the work performance of Queensland Police in the past 18 months has maintained a steady improvement, it was felt in police circles that more effort should be placed into the area of crime prevention. In late April this year I was asked to chair a meeting of police personnel with a view to planning a concentrated crime prevention campaign in a select area of Brisbane. The prime mover in such a scheme at this time was head of the Department's Crime Prevention Section, Sergeant George Lane.

Mr Lane suggested at this meeting that a saturation campaign initiated by police should aim at maximum community involvement to arouse public interest in the need for greater home security against

the inroads of criminals and to heighten awareness among citizens of the need to be on the alert for suspicious persons or acts within their neighbourhood. Sergeant Lane suggested that the Kenmore area, which had one of the highest incidence of breaking and entering offences in the State, would be an ideal location for such a campaign. The need for adequate publicity for such a project was discussed with the Department's Press Officer, Mr Ian Hatcher, who suggested that to be totally effective such a project would need the services of an outside firm of professional public relations specialists.

Subsequently, Mr John Butler, Queensland State Manager for Eric White and Associates, was asked to provide a submission and costing for the promotion of a crime prevention public relations programme for the Kenmore area.

In the event, Mr Butler's submission was accepted and Eric White's staff proved of immeasurable benefit in the promulgation of interest-creating activities among the public of the Kenmore area for this project.

It was further agreed at initial planning meetings that the Kenmore campaign be used as a pilot study. Conservatively, we aimed at a reduction of 50% in the number of breakings in the Kenmore District and surrounding suburbs. If the project proved a success, similar campaigns would be organised for other high crime rate areas in the Metropolitan Area and later in provincial areas of the State.

The overall title of the campaign was chosen as Operation Neighbourhood Watch which was self-explanatory and our public relations people mounted their effort to coincide with the theme — "Never give a burglar an even break."

It was decided that the campaign should run for a period of two months, from the beginning of June until the end of July. The initial four weeks in June to receive the full brunt of our efforts, leading up to the official opening of a new police station for the Kenmore district, and the final few weeks to be used to consolidate the impact on the public which had gone before.

The creation of a Kenmore Police District had been sought by local residents for some years because of the growth in population and affluence in this outer western suburban area of Brisbane. Previously the subject suburbs of Kenmore, Kenmore Hills, Anstead, Brookfield, Upper Brookfield, Pinjarra Hills, Pullenvale, Balbarry and Moggill had been policed from the Indooroopilly Station and through the metropolitan mobile patrol system.

Having decided on the area to be covered and the overall nature of the campaign, police involved in the Crime Prevention Bureau and the Public Relations Branch established contact with representatives of community organisations, schools, churches and youth groups in the Kenmore district. Each group was invited to send a representative to a meeting at which it was proposed to canvass their support for this crime prevention campaign.

I was personally delighted at the response of everyone concerned and the motivation of all people involved from that point until the end of the campaign.

The contribution made by private citizens to the Operation Neighbourhood Watch astounded both myself and every police officer with whom I came in contact during the campaign. Miss Susan Davies of Eric White Associates became the publicity co-ordinator and one of her first tangible products was a colour brochure designed to bring home to the householder the need for greater security around the home and what measures he or she could take to protect both their own and their neighbour's property. This brochure was inserted into every post box in the nine suburbs, with the postage rate being paid for as a community project by Kenmore Rotary Club.

The production and distribution of this brochure was closely followed by the issue of colour posters, stickers and badges bearing the theme, "Never give a burglar an even break".

Miss Davies and her team from Eric Whites also engendered tremendous interest from various business organisations within the community and financial support was offered from many sources. Backing was provided by the Commonwealth Bank, the National Bank, TVQ Channel 0, the AMP Society, the Community Crime Check Campaign and numerous small businesses in the Kenmore district, as well as the Police Department. Once the campaign got underway,

the Department received approaches from other business organisations volunteering financial backing for any future campaigns throughout the State.

A welcome feature of the campaign planning was the total co-operation of all groups within the community and particularly in the political area where politicians at all levels — federal, state and municipal J as well as parties of all political persuasions, joined in to ensure the success of Operation Neighbourhood Watch.

The campaign was officially launched by the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Alderman Frank Sleeman, at the Kenmore Shopping Centre on the morning of June 3. We were fortunate to receive the widest possible media coverage of this event, due in large measure to a novelty "incident" in which a civilian member of the Police Department dressed as an archetypal burglar interrupted the Lord Mayor's opening remarks to protest against the concept of such a campaign which would put him and his colleagues out of business. The large crowd at the opening and the media were taken aback as the burglar was led away, still protesting, by some uniformed police officers. Needless to say, this incident and the opening received excellent coverage on television and in newspapers during the following two days.

In conjunction with this opening, Sergeant Lane and Detective Senior Constable John Hopgood of the Crime Prevention Bureau had mounted a comprehensive display of security material and devices which attracted considerable public interest during the three weeks in which it operated in the Kenmore Shopping Centre.

The ground swell of support in the Kenmore district continued to build with a constant stream of publicity both in the local newspaper, on television and the major newspapers and radio.

I next became involved when I was asked to speak at a public meeting at the Kenmore South State School on the night of June 15. It was probably the worst night of the year, on the weather front, for any organisation to hold a public meeting. Only a super-optimist could have expected people to leave the warmth and comfort of their homes to brave the bleak and blustery conditions to attend such a meeting.

But attend they did and more than 200 local residents crowded into the amenities building of the Kenmore South State School to listen to a panel of speakers and asked questions connected with the crime check campaign. I believe this meeting showed how effective the work of the Citizens Committee, chaired by Mr Doug Donaldson of the Kenmore Lions Club, had been in arousing public interest.

One of the areas of media publicity which we found invaluable was the Police File programme on Channel 0 where Mr Jim Leigh continued to pique public curiosity and also organised a poster competition, again on the theme "Never give a burglar an even break," for school children in his Channel's viewing area. Valuable prizes were provided for this competition by local business houses and some 50 entries were received in three sections — under 8, 8 years to 12 years and 12 years to 17 years.

On Saturday, July 8 the local State Member and Minister for

Justice, Mr Bill Lickiss, officially opened the new Kenmore Police Station in the presence of the Police Commissioner, senior police officers and political, business and community leaders at No. 7 Princeton Street, Kenmore. This was the first police station to be opened in the metropolitan area for some 15 years and warranted the effort which was put in to make it the special occasion which it became. Some police stations in the metropolitan area have been relocated but Kenmore Police Station is positioned in an entirely new geographic area of Brisbane.

The station, under the direction of Segeant Denis Von Blankensee and with a staff of three Constables, obviously met with the widest approval in the community.

The opening ceremony was preceded by a display by the Queensland Police Pipe Band and after the opening, while official guests went to morning tea beneath the station, the band of the Kenmore High School provided musical entertainment for the large crowd of spectators in the area.

Public interest in the opening was further heightened by the associated organisation of a public carnival in surrounding streets and the nearby shopping centre. There were stalls selling refreshments, snacks, produce and household goods as well as merry-go-rounds for the children and displays by the Fire Brigade and other service organisations.

The interest was maintained after the opening and will continue until the end of July. It is interesting to note that statistics indicate the incidence of house breaking in the Kenmore district averaged about two a week for the past 12 months and about one and a half breakings for other premises such as offices, shops, schools, etc. Since the campaign started in June some eight weeks ago there has not been one house breaking in the area. The only breakings reported have been four shops. This is a vast reduction in crime for the area during the period.

An amusing incident arose out of the arrest of a top line house-breaker during the early stages of the campaign. This man admitted responsibility for some 200 breakings in the Brisbane metropolitan area over the previous few weeks. Investigating Detectives asked him whether he had committed any offences in the Kenmore area during that time.

His reply was: "No fear! This bloody campaign has got everyone stirred up out there and I wouldn't go near the place!"

I believe Operation Neighbourhood Watch in Kenmore and surrounding suburbs has been an unqualified success in terms of reducing the crime rate, educating the public in crime prevention measures and establishing a climate of the greatest possible co-operation between all levels of the community. The people of Kenmore have shown how effective such a campaign can be and it is up to them to ensure that the safeguards which they have implemented in the past eight weeks are maintained in the future.

Equally importantly, we now have a blue print for the successful implementation of further mass crime prevention campaigns in other areas of Brisbane and provincial areas throughout the State.

