

Police, residents initiate neighborhood watch

BEDFORD NEWS

OCT 5, 2012

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It was a celebration Oct. 1 as Lt. Michael Bernard, police officer Amy Champagne, Dennis “Mac” McMahan and neighbors in The Wines, the area around Suzanne Drive, gathered at the initiation of Bedford’s first neighborhood watch group.

“This is the first neighborhood watch in town, but we’ve always had community policing,” Bernard said.

The Bedford Police Department has divided community policing into four categories: Senior Citizens Program, Youth Programs, Neighborhood Watch, and Business and Retail.

Each program serves the community by reaching out to people of all ages and situations, from playing basketball with kids at the New Morning School to addressing businesses in town about fraud prevention.

About two months ago, McMahan contacted Champagne about starting up a neighborhood watch.

Champagne volunteered to head up this watch, and now, neighborhood watch signs are posted at each end of the neighborhood.

“We actually have a mass email list, so we can all communicate, which enabled us to get the signs up,” said resident Ursula Lariviere.

By reaching out, residents help “the Bedford police to reduce crime, solve problems and improve the quality of life in the town of Bedford,” according to the Police Department’s website.

“Bedford is generally not high-crime, so this is more about neighbors,” Champagne said about the difference between a crime watch and a neighborhood watch.

When neighbors go on vacation, they can let the Police Department know by filling out a form at the station with the dates they will be gone. From there, the day shift will watch over the property, noting which cars are in the driveway, while being mindful of people who may still be in the house.

Bernard said the forms should soon be available online.

“On a vacant property check, if anything seems out of place, we call the owners,” Champagne said. “In one case, the pipes burst on a property and the owners were in Florida. We called the owners so they could take care of the problem.”

Champagne said the only hesitation she has received about a neighborhood watch is from what people see in the media.

McMahan, who initiated the first neighborhood watch here, has been involved in many neighborhood watches. “I have seen how they work and they do work,” he said.

Since The Wines neighborhood watch started about the same time as the Florida incident in which teenager Trayvon Martin was allegedly killed by a member of a neighborhood watch, McMahan has reassured people that what happened in Florida is not part of the neighborhood watch.

“Keeping an eye on each other, that’s the big thing,” Bernard said. “It’s just a community coming together to watch out for each other.”

Two more areas in Bedford are establishing neighborhood watches.

“We want people to reach out to us,” Champagne said. “Then, it becomes a matter of neighbors helping neighbors.”

Bedford residents are encouraged to report anything suspicious in their neighborhood or one they’re driving through by calling the Bedford Police Department at 472-5113.

To contact Champagne, email achampagne@bedfordnh.org.



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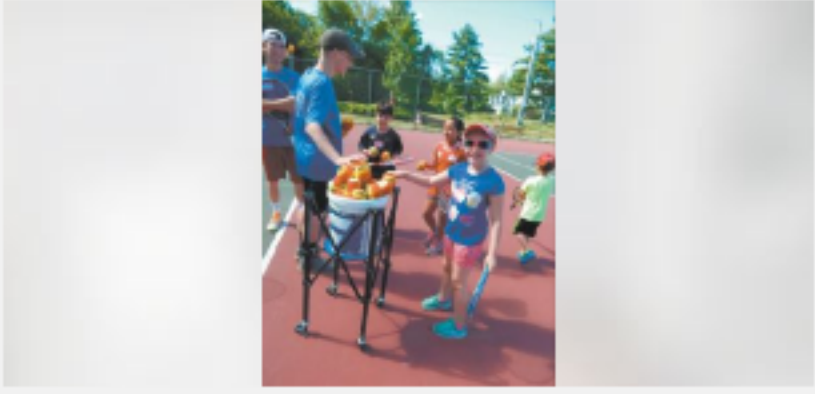
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