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URL: <http://www.abqjournal.com/west/opinion/292747westoped03-12-08.htm>

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

Retired Police Good Neighbors

By

For sheer discouragement, there is little that can match that feeling in the pit of your stomach when you come home and find your house or apartment has been burglarized.

Your mind was on other things— unloading the groceries, dinner for the kids, a TV show— and suddenly you notice a broken window, an open door, a ransacked dresser.

The rage that rises in you is startling. This is your home, your safe place. But even as the adrenalin rises and you look for something heavy to pick up in case you meet the intruder, you are uneasy. Is he gone?

You feel vulnerable. Your safe place has been violated. It will be weeks before you can again come home casually, thinking about nothing more than TV or dinner.

For many West Side residents, a recent rash of residential burglaries has added insult to injury: The thieves have been breaking in during the day, knowing the hardworking homeowners will be gone for at least eight hours making an honest living.

Between Jan. 19 and Feb. 25, there were 53 residential burglaries in a two-square-mile area of the West Side. Most occurred during business hours.

Burglary has almost become a business itself between Central Avenue on the north, Blake Road on the south, Coors Boulevard on the west and the Albuquerque city limits on the east.

But the business could be facing a downturn.

A posse is being formed— an armed posse of 40 ex-cops. In fact, the posse already exists: it's the Armed Response Team, a 5-year-old company made up of retired Albuquerque Police Department officers who respond to alarms for paying customers.

Company founder Phil Baca said that when his officers heard that Westside Area Commander Conrad Candelaria was asking for help on the burglary problem from civic groups, they thought, "OK, we can help."

At no charge to the city or homeowners, members of the response team will now patrol the area in marked and unmarked cars looking for suspicious activity.

Even though they are armed, the officers will not be drawing weapons or revving their vehicles into hot pursuit. When they suspect a burglary, they will

simply do what any good neighbor would do— if any good neighbors were home, that is, instead of across town working. They will call the police.

It's a neighborhood watch composed of professionals, filling in while the neighbors are away.

It's cops at their best, using their strength and skill on behalf of folks who feel vulnerable and violated.

"It's simply a way for us to give back," Baca said, "using our experience as police officers.

No matter how you say it, it's a great idea.

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