

**2009 ICMA Annual Awards Program Nomination  
Award for Program Excellence in Community Health and Safety Awards  
Park Seven Operation, Olathe, KS Nomination**

For most of its 150 year history, Olathe, KS has considered itself an independent, standalone community. In the last 20 years, with the growth of the metropolitan Kansas City region, Olathe has been enveloped by many of the social and economic challenges facing its neighbors. As is the case in nearly every community, nearly every resident wants to live free of fear and pursuing a better life for themselves and their children. In March, 2007, the Olathe Police Department working with an interdisciplinary and multi-agency team decided to confront one of those changes known as the Park Seven Operation.

The Park Seven Apartment complex was like any number of HUD (Housing and Urban Development) properties in the region. For Olathe though, for the previous several years, it generated a disproportionate number of per capita calls per unit compared to similar complexes. (2.68 to 1.06) The complex had a high number of violent and drug related calls for service as well as numerous instances of other criminal practices including one homicide. As a HUD property, residents were also required to report changes in income or residents within their units. (Failing to report *new* income or residents is a violation of their HUD contract and a felony under State of Kansas law.)

As they analyzed issues surrounding the Park Seven apartment complex, members of the Olathe Police Department's Community Outreach Unit began to understand that a different approach would be needed to address the challenges faced by residents in the area. Under the leadership of then Captain Steve Menke, a task force was formed and including representatives from the Olathe Police Department Community Services

Division and Investigations Division, HUD, Park Seven regional management, Johnson County Sheriff's Office, Kansas Social and Rehabilitative Services, Johnson County District Attorney's Office, and the United States Drug Enforcement Agency. (Steve Menke became Police Chief earlier this year.) After due deliberations, task force members decided that the best course of action was to remove problem tenants and allow the remaining residents to rebuild their quality of life.

To deal effectively with those elements in the complex that were most contributing to service calls and crime, the task force decided to focus on tenants who may be in violation of their HUD contracts or facing felony charges. A targeted approach approved that would attempt:

- A. To arrest as many violators as possible at one time to prevent suspects from fleeing,
- B. To provide law abiding tenants the peace of mind of knowing that the Police/HUD cared about their community, and
- C. To reduce calls for service, displace, deter, solve or prevent criminal activity.

At 4PM on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007, 78 Officers, Agents, Deputies, and civilian personnel went into action. The operation was planned around a six-hour timetable and included officers attempting contact every unit in the complex, stopping violators leaving the area, K9 officers checking every car in the parking lots and officers attempting to speak to everyone in the complex. HUD agents established probable cause procedures for violations where applicable and Officers and Deputies were present to address any other criminal violations. In less than eight hours, Olathe Police Department and task force members were able to arrest 11 suspects, stop 18 vehicles and other subjects

involved in suspect activities and meet with most of the residents in the complex. Numerous charges were eventually filed at both the State and Federal level.

Area residents were elated by the Park Seven Task Force efforts. In addition to the number of suspects arrested, 14% of the households on the property were evicted immediately following and as a direct result of the operation. That number rose to 28% in the following months. Not only were many of the problem occupants cleared from this complex, but they were effectively removed from any other HUD project in the nation since it is very difficult, if not impossible, for evicted individuals to ever get HUD benefits again.

In addition to removing many problem tenants, the remaining law abiding residents were appreciative of the law enforcement effort. Several residents contacted by officers during the operation commented that they were glad to see that the Police Department was taking action. As in any community, most of Park Seven residents were law abiding and only desired a good quality of life. However, their desire for a good quality of life was overshadowed by the criminals and criminal activity. They agreed that the complex needed work and were glad to see pro-active measures being taken.

Park Seven is not unique. As communities change, local officials must be prepared to deal with all contingencies. In Olathe's case, law enforcement and community rights groups worked together to effectively deal with a situation that had deteriorated. To accomplish this intervention, task force members had to be willing to develop contingency plans sooner rather than later. Jurisdictional concerns had to be addressed. The greater community need had to be understood and respected. In Olathe's case, it became evident in early planning stages that multiple contact teams

would be required and that timing was essential. Task Force members had to contact as many people as possible as quickly as possible. Concerns were raised that once residents saw that police were in the complex, criminal elements would try to leave or hide their actions. By using multiple teams, Task Force members were able to reduce the ability of individuals to evade detection. Perimeter teams and roving law enforcement vehicles added to the effectiveness of the effort. The use of “sole purpose” transport vehicles further enhanced the speed that the contact teams had by eliminating the need for them to transport any arrested individuals to jail one at a time.

The Park Seven Operation was successful in that multiple problems and problem violators were removed. A clear message was sent to the community that they were important and action was being taken. Those that were not committing crimes were impressed to see officers, deputies and agents in their homes while violators became aware that there were consequences for their actions.

This operation extended beyond the number of people arrested and/or evicted. The perception of crime changed in and around the complex. It affected how residents in the community perceive law enforcement and how they see themselves. They saw that troublemakers would be removed and that aggressive but respectful action would be a deterrent on crime and criminal behavior. Several problems were addressed as a result of this operation. Not only were violators arrested and potential violators were identified, but disruptive influences were removed by the complex's management in cooperation with HUD. Residents understood that the police department would take active action to resolve problems.

In the one year periods before and after the Park Seven operation, service calls decreased 50%. (204 vs. 102) The severity and intensity of those post operation calls were less violent and more familial. Resident satisfaction with HUD and Olathe Police Department efforts to improve the quality of life in their community increased immeasurably. The effects have been long lasting as Olathe Police continue to work with HUD and local residents to maintain their neighborhood.