

## **Nomination for Program Excellence Award for Public Safety Program Award in Memory of William H. Hansell Sr. and Alice Hansell**

Summary: The Anti-Cruising Program was implemented in April 2002 to combat a major problem with cruising in the City of Westminster. An Anti-Cruising ordinance, the first of its kind in Colorado, was designed to enable Police Officers to issue summonses to cruisers who had passed a cruising checkpoint three times or more within a three-hour period and between specific hours. Staff worked with area businesses and members from established Community Oriented Governance groups (also known as COG groups, which is the City's neighborhood outreach program). This ordinance provided a means for law enforcement personnel to address a problem and it built upon a platform for citizens, businesses and government agencies to work together to find a solution and then act on it. The ordinance and subsequent enforcement eliminated the cruising problem within three weekends and it has not returned.

Scope of the Problem: In late summer of 1999, the City of Westminster started to see an increase in cruising near the Westminster Mall area (located in the center of Westminster geographically). Staff began to receive calls from residents and businesses in the area voicing their concerns about traffic congestion and that the cruising had now spilled into the adjacent residential areas. Response times for Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) were being impacted due to the essential stand still traffic. This negative impact in response time was a public safety concern for the City. Staff spent numerous hours attempting to combat the cruising problem and used several different tactics, however, there was minimal success and the problem persisted. The cruising in Westminster had become a major problem for the City of Westminster, area businesses and the citizens residing in the adjacent neighborhood.

The problem of cruising in Westminster consisted of individuals, mainly juveniles, driving in a designated area known as the "loop" generally on Friday and Saturday nights. Numerous complaints were received from citizens who reside in the area due to the automobile noise, littering, drag racing and loud stereos. Residents also called to complain about the difficulty of getting into their neighborhoods due to the traffic volume. Police service events in this area increased in upwards of 400 percent in some cases. Police Officers

were handling incidents including stabbings, shooting incidents, fights, vandalism to vehicles, liquor violations, traffic violations, accidents and a variety of violations dealing with public peace and order that stemmed from the cruising.

Developing a Solution: In 2000, Staff formed an “Anti-Cruising Task Force” consisting of citizens, business owners, and police personnel to analyze the cruising problem in this area. The Anti-Cruising ordinance evolved from the research and the creativity of this group. City staff, businesses and citizens met to discuss the problem in detail. Discussion involved various tactics and alternatives that took into consideration time, money and personnel. Survey work was conducted in the area in order to help determine a solution that would benefit the neighborhood and businesses.

After considering feedback from surveys, from the Anti-Cruising Task Force meetings, and national research, a decision to proceed with an Anti-Cruising Ordinance evolved. The ordinance has several basic elements listed below:

- Signs would be posted along the roadway indicating that cruising is prohibited.
- Emergency vehicles, common carriers, and vehicles engaged in business would be exempted.
- The “enforcement period” was defined as being between 9:00 p.m. and 4:00 a.m.
- Passing a cruising checkpoint three times or more within a three-hour period of time between the enforcement period would create probable cause for a summons.
- License plates were tracked via the use of a palm pilot personal computer.
- The fine structure would be \$125 for the first offense; \$250 for the second offense and \$350 for the third offense.
- The violation of the cruising would be a non-criminal traffic infraction.

Staff and the Task Force explored other alternatives, but those alternatives ultimately were not recommended to City Council. Other alternatives included: not passing any ordinance and maintaining a proactive police presence, setting up road closures to interrupt the cruising, or adopting the cruising ordinance and reducing the fine structure. Ultimately, the City Council chose to adopt the Anti-Cruising ordinance with a

strict fine structure as recommended by the Police Department and Task Force. The desired results of eliminating cruising in this area were achieved as a result of this anti-cruising ordinance, public education and cooperation, and enforcement. Cost savings resulted from the elimination of increased overtime expenses associated with previous attempts to mitigate cruising in Westminster. Fire and EMS response times have returned to acceptable levels. The criminal activities in this area have decreased as the cruising essentially disappeared. This allows for valuable police resources to be refocused on other critical needs in the City.

This project brought neighborhoods, businesses and other community representatives together with City Staff to help solve what was a community problem. After the ordinance passed, staff focused on mounting a public education campaign including articles in various newspapers, notification to impacted neighborhoods and publication of pamphlets to be handed out to cruisers prior to enforcement and citations of violators.

Lessons Learned: The Police Department gained a better appreciation of engaging the community in addressing public safety issues within the City. By seeking feedback from neighborhood meetings and the business community, the City was able to eliminate a problem with minimal costs incurred. Cruising has not been an issue in the City of Westminster since the implementation of the Anti-Cruising Ordinance. The City of Westminster modeled its ordinance after similar ordinances from Naperville, IL and Virginia Beach, VA. The Anti-Cruising ordinance in Westminster was the first of its kind in the State of Colorado and it has been successful in eliminating cruising within the City.