



Sheriff: Numbers show County Crime Plan helping

Commissioners and Keuerleber say the Criminal Response Unit and Guardian Angels are a big reason for a drop in crime.

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Daily Record/Sunday News

Updated: 09/09/2009 08:24:10 PM EDT

Sheriff Rich Keuerleber says there has been a sharp drop in criminal activity in York County, and he gives a lot of credit to the county crime plan's criminal response unit and the Guardian Angels.

Keuerleber said Wednesday there was a 28 percent reduction in charges filed in the county Clerk of Courts Office when comparing May, June and July 2008 with the same months in 2009.

"You should see a spike in arrests in the warm months, and we're not seeing that," he said. "We are seeing a reduction. And the city is showing a 15 percent reduction in (violent) crime."

Keuerleber said 130 more beds are empty at the county prison than this time last year.

According to the sheriff's statistics, 546 new criminal cases were filed in the county Clerk of Courts office in July 2008. The number dropped to 280 this July.

"It paid off by putting the Criminal Response Unit and the Guardian Angels on the street," Keuerleber said.

The Criminal Response Unit, which patrols streets by foot or bicycle and stops any crimes it encounters, was created in June 2008. The Guardian Angels, a volunteer crime-prevention group that conducts foot and bicycle patrols throughout the city with assistance from the sheriff's office, became part of the crime plan in October 2008.

Michael Smith, president of the York County Chapter of the Guardian Angels, said, "Without looking at the statistics, I've seen a difference. Compared to Harrisburg and Lancaster, we're looking good."

Clerk of Courts Don O'Shell said the county recorded more than 8,000 criminal cases for the first time in 2007. He said the 2009 caseload appeared to be "on the same trajectory."

But, he said, there was only a 3 percent increase in the caseload in the second quarter this year.

"That reduces the stress on the court system and reduces the (county) budget," he said.

President County Commissioner Steve Chronister, who drafted the crime plan last year, said 80 percent of the county's general fund budget is used to prevent, combat and prosecute crime.

He also credited the drop in crime to Keuerleber, his eight-deputy Criminal Response Unit and the 30 Guardian Angels.

Commissioner Doug Hoke, who initially was lukewarm toward the plan largely because of funding, said Wednesday, "I approve of what they are doing. Collectively, they have had a very positive effect on the community."