



Neighbors all over Vallejo enjoy peaceful Night Out

By Sarah Rohrs / Times-Herald

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Nearly every night, Ricky Mitchell said he is awakened by police sirens and, sometimes, gunfire. He said he came to a National Night Out block party Tuesday evening to help take a stand against crime and promote peace.

"We just need everybody to get along and to stop the violence. We need to get more cops and firefighters in Vallejo," Mitchell said while enjoying food, music and friendship at the Night Out event at Tennessee and Monterey streets.

Throughout Vallejo Tuesday evening, nearly 40 similar block parties unfolded for the 19th annual National Night Out observance.

Parties drew scores of residents and business owners for the chance to get to know one another and send a message to criminals that they won't tolerate crime in their neighborhoods.

For the first time, the Marina Vista Tenants Association opened its National Night Out event to the public and residents. It drew several hundred people to the downtown public housing complex on Maine Street that has gained notoriety for occasional violence.

Downtown Vallejo also featured several neighborhood groups, which banded together to create a strong presence in the 200 block of Georgia Street.

Nellie Posey, a 75-year-old who lives in Marina Towers at 575 Santa Clara St., demonstrated martial arts techniques that seniors can embrace to help feel safe and empowered.

Getting involved in National Night Out, plus taking a martial arts class in the downtown area, has helped her feel safer and more involved in her neighborhood and city, Posey said.

"I don't feel so afraid in my community. I'm more involved in activities and events and I understand what's going on," Posey said.

Mayor Osby Davis attended numerous events, including ones in South Vallejo, the downtown, the Crest and Hiddenbrooke.

"It takes a whole community to make a community safe, not just police officers alone," Davis said. "I'm encouraged by those who participate and continue to participate in National Night Out."

Across town in South Vallejo, several hundred gathered at Emmanuel Temple Apostolic Church where a resource fair was held that featured health businesses, social services and other programs.

"It's wonderful," Shenedra Tate said of the event.

"It brings people together from the neighborhood and shows what Christians really are like. It shows people a better way of living," Tate said.

Fewer police officers and patrol cars, plus elimination of police dogs and other local law enforcement services has led numerous residents to help one another keep safe, organizers at Fighting Back Partnership said.

More neighborhood groups participated in this year's National Night Out than in previous years, an organizer said.

One long-distance visitor came from Cape Town, South Africa. An international Guardian Angel trainer, Charl Vijoen joined the Vallejo Guardian Angel chapter on Tennessee Street.

In the Bay Area for an international conference, Vijoen drove to Vallejo to get a better view of a National Night Out block party, something he wants to replicate in Cape Town.

"This says 'Let's find out who our neighbors are and who each other's children are and get to know one another. This is a good social event,'" Vijoen said.

Nearly a dozen local Guardian Angels were on hand to provide an anti-crime presence and promote community strength and resources, said Omar Martinez, Solano County Guardian Angels leader.

"This is about uniting the community against all the crime that's transpiring here in Vallejo," Martinez said. "We try to empower the neighborhood and encourage everyone to go out there and do something and take a stand," he said.

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