



Taking back the streets of Port Richmond

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. --- The massive NYPD presence in Port Richmond yesterday said it all: Enough is enough.

In the wake of yet another possible bias crime on Staten Island over the weekend, police last night blanketed Port Richmond in a push to stop a series of assaults and robberies that has left the borough's Mexican community shaken.



Staten Island Advance/Michael McWeeney/Nearly

30 police cars from precincts in Manhattan and Brooklyn line up on Park Place from Richmond Terrace to Ann Street in Port Richmond.

The NYPD deployed a task force in Port Richmond that includes a 24-hour command post at Port Richmond and Castleton avenues, two of the department's

NYPD's three-story collapsible Sky Watch towers -- one at the corner of Port Richmond Avenue and Richmond Terrace, the other at the corner of Port Richmond and Harrison avenues -- a phalanx of patrol cars, officers and detectives, said NYPD Deputy Inspector Kim Royster.

The police deployment came as public outrage over the attacks reached a fevered pitch.

The Consul General of Mexico in New York decried the attacks and stated it would "act decisively... in order to protect our citizens."

"I'm so thankful the police department has deployed additional resources to ensure the community of Port Richmond has maximum protection," said City Councilwoman Debi Rose, who has been in constant contact with the police following the attacks.

Deputy Inspector Royster said the heightened police presence includes:

* 20 "critical response vehicles," marked patrol cars that roll in a caravan to an emergency response;

* Additional plainclothes and uniformed officers;

* Directed patrols in certain areas, as well as helicopter sweeps;

* Officers and investigators from the Hate Crime Task Force and the Community Affairs division.

Detectives will be interviewing bus drivers along various bus routes in the Port Richmond area, in the hopes they might have information about the attacks, Deputy Inspector Royster said.

She added, "The NYPD is not an immigration agency, and we want victims of this particular crime and any crime to come forward."

Yesterday, Ms. Rose (D-North Shore) announced a bilingual website designed to make Mexican immigrants on Staten Island feel safe and part of the borough's diverse fabric.

Yesterday afternoon, members of the Guardian Angels arrived in the community to begin patrols.

Clad in their trademark red berets and jackets, the Angels, including founder and radio talk show host Curtis Sliwa, began walking around the community, mingling with residents and businesses and handing out fliers advertising their presence.

Sliwa said many crime victims don't come forward -- because people are afraid.

"They think they can wolfpack [the people] and nothing will happen to them and so far they are right. So its gotta be nipped in the bud," he said.

Sliwa said since the Guardian Angels have a presence in Mexico, it is very possible the victim could reach out to a relative in Mexico who in turn could reach out to the Guardian Angels.

"It's been very successful for us in Los Angeles and I think it may be successful for us in Staten Island," he said.

As Sliwa and the crew headed up bustling Port Richmond Avenue, where they pasted and handed out posters, they were greeted by handshakes and smiles, and many were simply happy to see a deterring presence.

"I will feel safer with them here. I hear about all the crimes going on and I don't like it," said

Joshua Gonzalez, 16, of Port Richmond.

Freddie Santana, 62, of the South Bronx, who runs a convenience store on Port Richmond Avenue, agreed. "I am so happy. I recognized him [Sliwa] and I said, 'It's about time.' We are getting some real response to the problem. These people really have been beaten down..."

LATEST INCIDENT

The latest incident took place in Meiers Corners, at about 8:30 p.m. Saturday. The NYPD's Hate Crimes Task Force is investigating the latest attack, though police yesterday said it was too soon to label it a bias crime.

According to the NYPD, the victim, a 32-year-old Hispanic male walking to a bus stop was attacked in front of 281 Brielle Ave., after he got into a dispute with a white male.

What they were arguing about wasn't clear last night, but the attacker beat his 32-year-old victim with a baseball bat.

The victim's injuries were not considered life-threatening but he needed to be taken to a hospital for stitches.

The attack appears to be the latest in a string of 10 attacks on Mexican immigrants on the Island since April. Most of those incidents have taken place in Port Richmond, which is home to a growing Mexican population, and in the majority of the cases, the attackers were identified as black men.

The attacks spurred Ms. Rose (D-North Shore) to create the website www.IAMSI.info, which has drawn international attention.

Standing with the Consul General of Mexico in New York Ruben Beltran, civic leaders and clergy at a press conference in Port Richmond, Ms. Rose said the website aims to give members of the borough's immigrant Mexican community and others a safe place to report bias attacks. She also said the website will attempt to create "unity" and offer information about community events.

Ms. Rose said the message to "victims of hate crimes is that they have nothing to fear ... regardless of their residence status."

Beltran said that while Mexican immigrants may arrive here with little luggage and "maybe not a visa," they "always travel with their human and civil rights."

"These cowardly attacks will cease," said Beltran. "Today we say, 'Enough is enough' ... We will not tolerate intolerance."

Beltran said he will post consulate personnel on the Island to help address the attacks. Yesterday, he said they will be hosted by the Rev. Troia and remain "as long as needed."

Beltran cautioned that while "there is no silver bullet to get everything to cease ... we are on our toes."

He said attacks on Mexicans living here are the result of "ignorance" and "intolerance."

"We will no longer react to hate, we will be proactive," said Assemblyman Matthew Titone (D-North Shore), who called perpetrators of such attacks "monsters."

In a written statement yesterday, Rep. Michael McMahon said in part, "The string of hate crimes plaguing Staten Island (is) reprehensible and we will not tolerate it. "

Authorities have made arrests in a few of the cases so far. Four suspects have been indicted, though not for hate crime offenses, on charges they robbed Rodulfo Olmedo, a 25-year-old Mexican baker, beating him so badly that his skull was cracked.

And authorities have secured convictions against two suspects, a man and a woman, in connection with the muggings of two Mexican men in April. A grand jury did not indict on hate crime charges in either case. The man, Anthony Jones, 21, got a six-year prison sentence for the robberies, while the woman, Waheeda Sadick, 20 received five years probation.

Meanwhile, Ms. Rose said she doesn't want residents of the North Shore "to give up hope."

"We recognize the problem," said Ms. Rose. "We are working to make sure everyone is safe in our community. The North Shore is still the best place to live. We have hit a bump in the road, but we will work this out so we can continue to celebrate our diversity."

--- With Judy L. Randall and Kiawana Rich