

DARBY DAKROW
AWARD NOMINATION

"I can remember back in 1971, when I was in patrol, we would take rocks, bottles, and gunfire from that address. We tried everything to shut that place down. I can't believe it is still a problem."

These words were spoken by a SDPD detective at a meeting that focused on a nuisance on the 5000 La Paz Street in the southeastern Division. This nuisance resulted in numerous police confrontations with the inhabitants of this address and their acquaintances. Records indicated that the residents of 5081 La Paz and their associates had engaged in illegal activities for over two decades. Police officers used traditional responses such as selective enforcement, and executing search warrants in an unsuccessful attempt to halt the criminal activity on this street.

In January of 1988, the arrest of the suspected murderer of San Diego Police Officer Jerry Hart was made at 5081 La Paz. This event resulted in a commitment by Darby Darrow, a Southeastern patrol officer to devise a strategy to finally close down the criminal activity at this address. Darby asked two officers to work with him on this project, officers David Williams, and Steven Kingkade. This was the beginning of collaboration with a number of officers throughout the life of this project as Darby assumed a role of both lead officer and project facilitator. Using their collective past experiences with the occupants of 5081 La Paz and their discussions with other police officers, the three officers

identified the problem as illegal narcotic activities of the occupants of 5061 and their associates-

To begin the analysis of this problem, information was collected relating to the address and its inhabitants. On their personal time, the officers went to the home and spoke with the elderly owner, a 71 year old woman who used her monthly social security checks to support herself- The officers discovered that the only persons living in the house with the owner were her son, two grandsons, and one daughter. The officers knew from reviewing past arrest records and their own interactions with the resident, that dozens of people frequented the house at all hours of the day and night. The owner told the officers that she was willing to assist the police, but she would not evict her relatives and she would not move out of the house. She allowed officers to take photographs of the interior and exterior of the house which revealed the poor condition of the residence.

Darby found difficulty in believing the owner's statement that she was oblivious to the drug dealing and use that occurred inside and outside of her home. He phoned the owner's private physician to ensure that she was not mentally and physically incompetent. Although reluctant to reveal any patient information, the physician assured Darby that the owner was mentally competent during her last visit with him.

Darby spoke with the owner's granddaughter who said that she had previously attempted to move her grandmother out and board the

residence, but was unsuccessful in convincing her grandmother to move. When Darby explained his intent to eliminate the illegal activity at this home using drug abatement to confiscate the property, the granddaughter promised to try again to move her grandmother from the residence. As more information was gathered, arrests and drug seizures continued to mount at 5081. Also during this time, the owner's son was arrested for parole violation and sent back to (state prison..

All arrests and field interview records were collected by the three patrol officers who divided duties of data collection among themselves. To correctly calculate the number of radio calls at the property, the officers decided that they needed information that the Communications Division had access to, but did not make available to area commands. With the assistance of their commanding officer, they submitted a formal request to communications asking that a case be formulated every time an officer contacted someone on the 5000 block of La Pa?. The new information from Communications permitted one officer to locate all radio calls and criminal histories associated with the property.

Darby returned to the neighborhood to learn more from the area residents about the problems at 5081 La Pas. A brief survey of the neighbors was conducted which revealed that the area residents were willing to assist him in ridding their neighborhood of the ongoing problems of 5081, but feared retaliation from the occupants of the house. One problem in obtaining information came after requesting

that the Narcotics Street Team identify the number of search warrants executed at 50B1, Darby was told that he would need a court order to obtain this information, in fact, this was not the case as the officer later determined and this problem was handled through direct communication with the Team supervisor. To address the question of whether the elderly resident was a victim or a willing participant in a family drug business, the officers sought the assistance of a senior citizen group that focused on protecting the welfare and rights of the elderly.

Although illegal activity continued at 5081 La Paa, the officers were successful in placing the property on the joint San Diego Abatement Task Force target list. During the long abatement process, officers continued selective-enforcement at the address to assure neighbors that the Police Department was continuing their efforts to rid the neighborhood of the criminal problems.

In the months to follow, Darby worked closely with Abatement Task Force members to expedite the process. He set up a number of meetings with Task Force members including the City Attorney. At one meeting, the owner was given two months to evict the people involved in the illegal activity and to repair the house and yard prior to any legal proceeding beginning against her.

With criminal activity continuing on the property, Darby sought financial assistance for the elderly owner through the Housing Commission deferred home loan program. Also, labor for the home improvement was arranged through a community service program

for juvenile offenders. The owner was told that the recommendation for the loan would not be given until all the conditions stated at the abatement meeting were met, mainly the evictions of her son and grandchildren*

The continuation of illegal activity at the residence confirmed that a legal abatement process was needed to solve this neighborhood problem. Other agencies involved in the abatement process began their work as Darby and others continued to stake arrests at the residence for narcotic and weapons violations.

When Housing Inspectors for the City conducted an inspection of the property on La Pa», they found twenty various housing violations. To assist the City Attorney in the pending court appearance, Darby collected arrest records for a three year period and took aerial photographs from the Department's helicopter of the residence.

Prior to the court hearing, a San Diego Union reporter went on a ride-a-long to interview officers and the elderly resident regarding the project. While at the residence a grandson became very hostile and threatened the officer and reporter. Finally, during the court proceeding, the owner of the property was ordered out. One day later, with the help of Legal Aid a writ was filed to stop the board-up of the residence. Apparently, only one Notice Of Closure was served to the owner and the abatement process fell through. To add fuel to this disappointment, a headline in the Union appeared stating -Abatement; widow is ordered Out of Home*.

During the year that followed the original court date, restraining orders were served upon all residents of the property by the elderly owner. Both grandsons were convicted of violation of the restraining order and have served over a year in custody. The judge promised to "up the ante" for each additional violation. The City Attorney requested that officers get more arrests from the residence before the abatement process restarted.

A community meeting was held to discuss the problems with the residents and to ask for their ideas and participation in dealing with the activity. The neighbors were divided over the solutions as they felt allegiance to the elderly woman but clearly wanted the illegal activity to stop. Several neighbors committed to assisting Darby and others in monitoring the activity at the house.

. Additionally, contrary to requests from Darby and other police personnel and without their knowledge, the City Attorney signed a stipulation judgement with the elderly owner. The stipulation gave the owner an additional one year to make repairs and stop illegal activity at the residence and lifted the abatement process. This stipulation was entered into three years after the starting date of the original patrol project and almost two years from the starting point of the abatement process. At this point, Darby and his supervisor requested administrative intervention. The entire command staff of the Police Department met in a special session to discuss and plan strategies for achieving more effective collaboration with the city Attorney's office. Darby attended this

meeting along with his sergeant and lieutenant, a narcotics supervisor who had supervised Darby's efforts at this address, and the POP Coordinator. Outside the meeting, the lieutenant said, "that was the first time in the 15 years that I've been on this Department that I ever remember senior officers getting involved in an officer's beat problem."

For Darby, the original goal of his project which was to clean up the house by rehabilitating the family or getting the family out changed as the project evolved. When it became clear that the family was not going to be rehabilitated, the goal became to get the rest of the neighborhood involved in taking responsibility for the problem. The outcome to date has been that the elderly owner was finally relocated with a responsible family member;*** The Housing Commission agreed to rehabilitate the house through a federal loan to another responsible family member. The neighbors rat once again to agree to support this rehabilitation effort and to pledge to watch out for renewed activity. It is clear to all concerned that while some very positive outcomes resulted, community involvement and ownership of this neighborhood is the only viable way to maintain a long term solution to this problem.

Darby was asked what recommendation he would make to assist other officers in dealing with a similar problem* He was adamant in stating that it was essential to get a strong commitment from the community at the beginning so that the community goals were clear, and the community members would take ownership of the

problem, along with the officer, all through the problem solving process. Darby also stated that the city Council District office should be involved as well from the beginning. This would include taking Council aides along when neighborhood surveys were conducted so residents could express their private views without fear of retaliation from expressing them in public meetings.

officer Darrow was transferred to a special assignment long ago* He has continued to monitor and work on this project in addition to his other duties. Darby is known and respected throughout the Department as an excellent officer and a committed, persevering individual- Darby's work at 5081 La Pa2 over the last five years has served as a training tool, and an impetus for the Department to challenge many of the barriers that make it difficult for officers to do effective problem solving. The major lesson learned by the San Diego police Department in our commitment to problem solving is that, the process of problem solving is just as important as the desired outcome which may have to be modified due to the dynamic nature of the environment in which police services are delivered.

The San Diego Police Department recommends the nomination of Darby Darrow as the exemplary example of problem solving for the First Annual Problem Solving Award, one that demonstrates the highest quality of problem solving and police professionalism in an officer.