

*Nomination For  
The 1998 Herman Goldstein Award  
For Excellence In Problem-Oriented Policing*



Submitted by  
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Chief of Police

**1998 HERMAN GOLDSTEIN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE  
IN PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING  
AWARD NOMINATION  
REDONDO BEACH (CA) POLICE DEPARTMENT**

**ABSTRACT**

In an effort to impact the problem of property related crime in the City of Redondo Beach, Lieutenant John Skipper, City Prosecutor Mike Webb, and Sergeant John Simmons devised and implemented a two pronged problem solving strategy by employing the SARA model, then working with resources from within the law enforcement community and the community at large to impact the problem.

According to the most recent community survey, property related crimes ranked at the top of community concerns. It was theorized by Lieutenant Skipper and City Prosecutor Webb that the majority of property crimes were committed by career criminals. This theory was confirmed by an examination of property crimes where individuals had been arrested. Two-thirds of the recorded property crimes in the city were committed by individuals with prior arrest records, who were either on probation or parole, and resided outside of the city. A large number of these individuals were also gang members.

Based on this information, Lieutenant Skipper and Mr. Webb devised a plan to address both resident and non-resident criminals. The most active career criminals in the city were systematically identified. Once identified, those individuals became the subject of maximum enforcement, prosecution and

sentencing efforts. To date, 110 of **the** 185 identified habitual offenders have been arrested and sentenced to either county jail or state prison.

Lieutenant Skipper and Mr. Webb then created an undercover storefront/fencing operation manned by officers from the Police Departments of Redondo Beach, Torrance and Palos Verdes Estates.

Funding was generated by a uniquely creative concept created by Mr. Webb that allowed the use of fines and reimbursements from convicted misdemeanor offenders. A storefront, office space, and equipment was donated by local businesses making this a truly public/private partnership.

This project lasted 10 months and resulted in nearly 200 career criminals being taken off the streets, the recovery and return of \$4.3 million in stolen property, including 212 stolen vehicles, to victims, and 80 career criminals arrested and charged with 539 felony counts.

The department's response to the public's perception of safety was significantly enhanced due to the extremely positive media coverage.

Governor Pete Wilson as well as other county and local dignitaries joined the community at a press conference on "Roundup" day where the project was officially recognized as "the most successful sting operation in California history".

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**DESCRIPTION**

**SCANNING**

The most recent community survey indicated that property crime, particularly auto theft and auto burglary, were among the top concerns of the residents of Redondo Beach.

Both Lieutenant John Skipper and City Prosecutor Mike Webb felt, based on experience, that repeat offenders and career criminals were responsible for a disproportionate amount of felony property crimes in the city. If this intuition proved correct, it would then stand to reason that the identification of these individuals would be the first step in a problem-solving project aimed at the reduction of property crime, the return of stolen property to victims, and a greater perception of safety for the citizens of the city.

There was also a general perception that much of the crime committed in the city was committed by individuals who resided outside the city limits. Due to the geography of the greater Los Angeles area, interjurisdictional crime is a well established problem and long standing challenge to law enforcement agencies in the area. Any serious attempt to impact our transient and out-of-town property crime problem would likely have to involve resources from neighboring jurisdictions.

The fact that out-of-town criminals were active within our city did not mean that there were no "homegrown" criminals within Redondo Beach. On the contrary, both Mr. Webb and Lieutenant Skipper were quite familiar with dozens of local criminals who were quite adept, in their own rite, at committing property crimes. In that respect, it was clear that a problem-solving project aimed at impacting property crimes would have to be multi-pronged and incorporate resources throughout the department including investigations, patrol, and administration.

Community involvement, in the beginning, was limited to survey results as a basis for further exploration. That involvement would grow with the project and eventually prove crucial to its success.

### **ANALYSIS**

Working with the Crime Analysis Unit, Gang Unit, and Special Investigations Unit, Lieutenant Skipper and Mr. Webb learned that a significant number of property crimes in the city were committed by:

- Repeat offenders
- Persons on probation or parole
- Gang members
- Non-residents (two-thirds of those arrested in the city did not live there)

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As a result of this study, the following two-pronged strategy to target career criminals and serious offenders in Redondo Beach and the greater South Bay Region of Los Angeles County was implemented:

1. Identify the most serious and active habitual offenders residing in Redondo Beach and maximize apprehension, prosecution and sentencing efforts of these individuals.
2. Target perpetrators of Part I property crimes regionally by developing an undercover fencing operation aimed at identifying career criminals and recovering stolen property.

Problem-Solving Project Goals were developed to:

- Reduce property crime by identifying and arresting those people who most often commit property crimes
- Recover and return stolen property to victims
- Provide the residents of Redondo Beach with a greater perception of safety
- Obtain state prison sentences on career criminals and gang members

## **RESPONSE**

Phase One of the project began immediately. Officers from throughout the department were asked to submit "candidates" for selection to a list of the most active habitual offenders in the city. Mr. Webb worked with Crime Analyst Dawn Switzer and officers from the Special Investigations Unit to compile this

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list, which would ultimately total 185 individuals. In addition to this, Mr. Webb located approximately 4,100 outstanding arrest warrants for individuals who committed crimes in Redondo Beach. The service of these warrants was incorporated into the "zero tolerance" philosophy of our Problem-Solving Career Criminal Project.

Using tactics successfully employed during the department's Gang Injunction Project (which earned our department the 1996 Herman Goldstein Excellence In Problem-Solving Honorable Mention Award), officers from the Patrol, Traffic, and Investigations Divisions worked in tandem to monitor the activities of, and arrest when appropriate, our top criminals. Since the project was initiated, 110 of the top 185 habitual offenders identified have been arrested. Mr. Webb and the District Attorney's Office have aggressively sought maximum jail sentences and stringent terms and conditions of probation on convicted subjects. 67 of these habitual offenders have been sentenced to terms between six months and four years in the County Jail for misdemeanor convictions or to State Prison for felony crimes.

Phase Two of the project proved to be a bit more involved and much more complex. In March of 1997, Mr. Webb, Lieutenant John Skipper, and Sergeant John Simmons (Special Investigations Unit Supervisor) attended training in how to develop an undercover "Storefront" fencing/sting operation. Such an operation essentially involves undercover police officers posing as fences and purchasing stolen property from criminals. The transactions are recorded on

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video tape, the property is kept for eventual return to the victims, and upon completion of the project, the suspects are arrested. Similar operations nationwide have often proved very productive, but they also present a number of problems to an agency our size, particularly in the following areas:

- Manpower
- Operational funds
- Storefront and office space
- Technical and logistical support

All of these concerns were addressed in a proposal to Chief of Police Mel Nichols recommending the formation of a multi-jurisdictional undercover storefront. With the approval of the Chief of Police, the project became a reality and the team members began work on each of the above mentioned hurdles.

### MANPOWER

Redondo beach committed one sergeant and four investigators to the project. These personnel came from the Special Investigations Unit (S.I.U.). S.I.U. is a surveillance team normally assigned to narcotics/vice crimes and career criminals. It was felt that those assets would be as productive, if not more productive, in the apprehension of career criminals, while assigned to the storefront, than they would be in their traditional assignment. The two remaining S.I.U. investigators would continue in their normal assignment to handle day-to-day narcotics and vice investigations.

Nine surrounding law enforcement agencies were contacted and asked to provide one officer to the project. Due to manpower constraints, only the Torrance and Palos Verdes Estates Police Departments were able to contribute one undercover officer each to the operation.

One month into the operation, it became apparent that there was a need for an additional investigator, not to work undercover, but to assist in the identification of suspects and matching recovered property to reported crimes. To fill this need, an officer from the Redondo Beach Police Department Patrol Division was temporarily reassigned to the Investigations Division for the duration of the project.

During the final two months of the project, the workload was such that another request went out to surrounding agencies for assistance. Investigators were needed to help prepare dozens of cases with hundreds of felony counts for prosecution. One investigator each was loaned to the project from the Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department, Manhattan Beach Police Department and the El Segundo Police Department.

Throughout the project, surveillance assets were used from the Torrance Police Department, a county wide auto theft task force known as TRAP and a multi-agency county wide crime impact team known as LA IMPACT.

In the final "Roundup" Phase of the operation, SWAT teams from the Redondo Beach, Torrance, and El Segundo Police Departments were utilized to serve arrest and search warrants for the suspects involved.

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Legal assistance, training, and prosecution were handled by the Redondo Beach City Prosecutor's Office and the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office.

OPERATIONAL FUNDS

Initial funds committed to the project were \$25,000 transferred from the Drug Asset Seizure account from the City of Redondo Beach and \$5,000 provided by the City of Torrance. The primary funding source though, came from the Redondo Beach City Attorney's Office. City Attorney Jerry Goddard and Mike Webb, in conjunction with City Manager Paul Connolly, established a "Serious Crime Reduction Fund". This funding plan, conceived by Mike Webb, provided for convicted misdemeanants, as a condition of probation, to reimburse the City of Redondo Beach for the inconvenience of having to arrest and prosecute them in addition to paying their court ordered fine. If the individual and his/her attorney, agreed to this voluntary program, a plea bargain was reached. The reimbursement monies were then deposited in to the Serious Crime Reduction Fund and used to investigate and arrest serious felons. This unique funding concept, approved by the Mayor and City Council of Redondo Beach, generated approximately \$12,000 per month for the duration of the project. Monies from this account could be used for any portion of the project from paying overtime to purchasing stolen cars. The Serious Crime Reduction Fund provided 5220,000 to the operation, \$181,000 of which was used to purchase stolen property.

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The City of Redondo Beach was also reimbursed an additional \$25,000 from various insurance companies and rental car agencies whose property we recovered. These monies were replacement, dollar for dollar, on money expended to recover cars that impacted these agencies as losses. Since we were paying roughly four cents on the dollar for stolen cars, this was very cost effective to these companies. The city also received \$5,000 reimbursement from the Federal Bureau Of Investigation for providing them with critical information to a major case that they were investigating.

#### STOREFRONT AND OFFICE SPACE

Early on in the operation, Sergeant John Simmons made contact with several members in the local business community in an effort to obtain locations for both the storefront operation and an off-site office to serve as a kind of "Headquarters". Within days, he was successful on both endeavors. A large business in the city donated a furnished office, free of charge, for one year and a private property owner also donated, free-of-charge for one year, an ideal space for the storefront.

#### TECHNICAL AND LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

This challenge consisted of equipping and furnishing the storefront and office location. It also included the installation of necessary video and audio cameras in the storefront and undercover van used in the project's mobile operations.

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By contacting local businesses, officers were able to furnish both the storefront and office with donated equipment. Computers for the operation were literally built by one of the undercover officers using parts "scrounged" from throughout the department. The installation of surreptitious audio and video recording devices was performed by a Redondo Beach Police Reserve Officer who donated much of this equipment and all of his labor. Other vital equipment and parts were paid for out of the Serious Crime Reduction Fund.

The project officially began undercover operations on June 1, 1997 and culminated on April 2, 1998. Until the middle of January, 1998 officers were engaged in the undercover purchasing of stolen property and the identification of the career criminals who were bringing the property in. From late January until April, investigators were compiling and filing cases as well as arresting suspects. On April 2, 1998, the final suspects were arrested and the operation made public in a massive and well coordinated press conference coordinated by Captain Jeff Cameron. This press conference was attended by California Governor Pete Wilson, Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, Los Angeles County District Attorney Gil Garcetti and members of the City Councils of Torrance and Redondo Beach. Also at the Press Conference was Steven Frazier, the California Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) "Sting" instructor and author of "THE STING BOOK", who called the project, now known as "Operation Bull Market", "the most successful sting operation in California History".

## **ASSESSMENT**

Statistically "Operation Bull Market" was credited with the following:

- \$4.3 Million in stolen property recovered
- 4.2 cents/\$ spent in recovery
- 212 stolen vehicles recovered
- 96 suspects identified (80 arrested to date)
- 84 suspects (87.5%) have prior felony arrests
- 39 suspects (41%) have been identified as confirmed gang members
- 539 felony counts filed

Suspects were charged with crimes including armed robbery, car jacking, grand theft, receiving stolen property, auto theft, solicitations of stolen property, and perjury.

In addition to solving many South Bay crimes, investigators developed information that solved serious felonies being actively investigated by the following agencies:

- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- U.S. Postal Service
- U.S. Secret Service
- Los Angeles Police Department
- Inglewood Police Department

- Beverly Hills Police Department
- Palos Verdes Estates Police Department
- Hawthorne Police Department

These statistics make it clear that the project goals of impacting career criminals and gang members and returning stolen property to victims were met.

Thanks to Captain Cameron's efforts with the press, publicity surrounding this project was more than positive. The operation received over 35 minutes of news coverage on culmination day including several 3-4 minute pieces that were broadcast nationally. Telephone calls, officer contacts and "word of mouth" quickly convinced us that the goal of enhancing the public's perception of safety had also been met.

As to the remaining goal of reducing property crime, it is too early to determine as of this writing. We do know the following though:

- 110 habitual offenders were arrested in Phase One with 86 sentenced to county jail or state prison
- 80 career criminals were arrested in Phase Two ("Operation Bull Market") with a 100% conviction rate and 70% of those receiving state prison sentences
- The 80 "Operation Bull Market" suspects were responsible for committing 539 felonies during a 10 month period

Considering these facts, an anticipated decrease in the overall property related crime in the city is not an unreasonable expectation.

### SUMMARY

The habitual offender project and "Operation Bull Market" have been very successful operations that resulted in taking career criminals off the street, returning millions of dollars of stolen property to victims, and providing the citizens of Redondo Beach and other South Bay communities with a sense of security and safety. Since the project was funded by misdemeanor criminals, the accomplishments were obtained with no fiscal impact to either the police department or the city.

This project was truly "Community Oriented" in that it involved members of the Redondo Beach Police Department from all divisions, dozens of neighboring law enforcement agencies, and numerous community and business organizations in the region.

Although many people worked to make these projects successful, the following key individuals comprised the core team, that brought everything together:

- Lieutenant John Skipper and City Prosecutor Mike Webb conceived the two pronged attack on career criminals. Mr. Webb played a very crucial role in providing funds for the project with his innovative Serious Crime Reduction Fund plan. Lieutenant Skipper served as the Project Administrator for the duration of the operation.

- Sergeant John Simmons served as the Project Supervisor and oversaw the day-to-day operations of the project. Sergeant Simmons managed hundreds of thousands of dollars and organized hundreds of undercover operations without a single injury. Additionally, Sergeant Simmons organized and oversaw the arrest of dozens of suspects and supervised the preparation of reports and felony filings related to over 500 felony counts. An extremely monumental task done extraordinarily well.
- Undercover Officers Rody Contreras, Marina Morales, Kevin McCamy, Jim Booth and Maureen Hyde from the Redondo Beach Police Department, Officer Tom Dorsey, from the Torrance Police Department, and Officer Greg Robinson, from the Palos Verdes Estates Police Department, were on the "front line" every day for 10 months making this extraordinary operation a reality.

We feel this project is an outstanding example of the C.O.P.P.S. philosophy and we are proud to submit it for consideration.

**AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION**

1. At what level of the police organization was this problem-solving initiative adopted e.g., the entire department, a few select officers, etc.)?

This project was proposed and adopted at the level of the Chief of Police. Knowledge of the project was shared only on a "need-to-know" basis due to its clandestine nature.

2. Did officers or management receive any training in problem-oriented policing and/or problem solving before this project began or during its execution?

In December of 1993, Mel Nichols was appointed Chief of Police. He immediately established a philosophy of Community Oriented Policing and Problem-Solving (C.O.P.P.S.) By early 1995, the entire department had received community oriented policing and problem-solving policing training. Additionally, Management, i.e. Sergeants, Lieutenants, Captains and the Chief, received advanced problem-solving policing training.

3. Were additional incentives given to police officers who engaged in problem solving?

All of the department's police officers are required to engage in problem-solving activities, regardless of their assignment. No incentives, per se, are given to officers participating in problem-solving activities, however officers who are particularly successful are recognized through departmental awards or other means of special recognition.

4. What resources and guidelines (manuals, past problem-solving examples, etc.) were used, if any, by police officers to help them manage this problem-solving initiative?

All key project personnel had prior experience with significant problem-solving projects. An example of one of these problem-solving projects was our Gang Injunction, which was mentioned earlier. Project personnel followed the SARA model as outlined in the department's C.O.P.P.S. Manual.

5. What issues/problems were identified with the problem-oriented policing model or the problem-solving model?

In this particular project, the community survey identified and confirmed our officers' belief that property crimes, committed by habitual offenders were a significant problem not only in our city, but also in the greater South Bay Area of the County, of Los Angeles.

6. What general resources (financial and/or personnel) were committed to this project, and of those resources, what went beyond the existing department budget?

Manpower commitment consisted of 1 Lieutenant (Project Administrator), 1 Sergeant (Project Supervisor), 5 Investigators from the Redondo Beach Police Department and 1 Investigator each from the Police Departments of Torrance and Palos Verdes Estates. Since the project grew beyond our wildest expectations, Investigators from

the Police Departments of Manhattan Beach and El Segundo, and the Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department were added. Throughout the project, surveillance and tactical teams from other South Bay Law Enforcement Agencies were utilized. Office space, for both the storefront operation and investigative case management, equipment, including office furnishing and surreptitious audio and video devices, and even some vehicles were donated to the project from community businesses. Financial resources were received as follows: \$25,000 from the Narcotic Forfeiture Fund, \$5,000 each from the Torrance Police Department and the Federal Bureau Of Investigation; \$25,000 from automobile dealerships, rental, and insurance agencies. \$220,000, the bulk of the funds, came from the uniquely conceived "Serious Crime Reduction Fund", as explained earlier. There was "zero" impact on the General Fund of the department and the city.

7. Project Contact Person:

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