

## **SOUTH SENECA CRUISING PROJEC.**

In the following pages you will find a report that has touched many lives and opened new doors. There have been new friendships built and new understandings reached. This project centers around "Cruising." For generations, people young and old have retreated to this habit forming ritual. Some look forward to meeting new people, while others want to show off their nice cars. Even though this habit sounds like everybody is having a good time, there are some citizens who are negatively impacted by the activity.

Cruising can impact a neighborhood or business district in many ways. The noise can be overwhelming and traffic congestion can become annoying. When you are subjected to loud car stereos, littering, traffic congestion, and vandalism on a weekly basis this can become very frustrating to the neighborhood. As far as they are concerned they are out to have a good time and couldn't possibly imagine loud music bothering anybody.

The cruisers themselves were a very important part of this project. Not only did we conduct surveys with them, but their assistance with different South Seneca events was invaluable. We found out that by working together with cruisers, the neighborhood, and the South Seneca businesses, we could get so much more accomplished. This project could not have been done without a collaborative effort. Even though some groups didn't totally agree with each other, we could still reach an agreement or solution.

We will continue our work with South Seneca, so that cruising will remain safe for all involved. The first event for the summer was a "Kick Off Parade." We also had our first Car Show on May 15, 1998. Both events had a great turnout and we will be looking forward to other events in the coming months.

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To most people when you say the word "Cruising," it might be thought of as a fun way to spend an evening; for example- meeting new people and showing off a nice car. Although, this is good for some, this may not be the case for the residents who live in the community where the cruising is taking place. When you say the word "Cruising" to them, it might mean; loud stereos, littering, loitering, vandalism and traffic problems. The main concern that most area residents have are that the cruising is taking place in a community that is not only a business district, but also a residential area. These two combined can cause some friction among all parties involved.

One of the ways in which we identified the problem was a survey with the businesses and the neighborhood that were affected by the cruising. There were also many neighborhood meetings to better discuss the concerns in person. After doing the surveys we found out that some main concerns dealt with vandalism and loud stereos. The main source of complaints came from business employees and residents who lived in the area.

The reason this project was selected was because of the increase of crimes in the South Seneca area. These crimes included; vandalism, to both businesses and residential areas, loitering, littering, disturbances, traffic problems and loud stereos. These activities caused a great deal of concern for both the neighborhood and businesses in the area.

We were surprised to learn that cruisers were not only teenagers, but also adults enjoyed the ritual of cruising. The age group ranged from fifteen years old to twenty-five years old. The

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cruisers seemed to come from all parts of the city of Wichita and outside the city of Wichita, including several small towns not far from Wichita.

One of the first surveys asked questions such as; Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? The survey also asked the person being surveyed to list any concerns he or she might have with the South Seneca area. After reading the results of the survey a plan was developed. We gathered additional information from the Wichita Police Department's Crime Analysis Unit. This information told us that there were a large number of vandalisms, assaults, and citations being issued. We realized that just because many tickets were being written and arrests made, the cruising remained the same every weekend. There had to be a different way to handle the cruising situation for everyone involved, instead of traditional enforcement.

Cruising in WICHITA, KANSAS has a very long history. Between the 1970's and late 1980's cruising took place on Douglas Street; which was in the downtown area. The street ran east and west. On each side of the street there were businesses and many stop lights, which resulted in very slow traffic movement. None of the businesses were open during the cruising hours and the cruisers did not disturb any nearby residential areas. Overall, this was an ideal spot for the cruisers. There were occasional vandalism, littering, and disturbances. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, they did not disturb any nearby residential areas. Due to the revitalization of the downtown area cruising soon ended on Douglas. However, this did not stop the cruisers from looking for other places to cruise! A new location was soon found, which was South Seneca. This location was chosen because of the many fast food restaurants, 24 hour convenient stores, and many large parking lots. South Seneca soon became the hot-spot for cruisers. Still, this decision

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was not so popular with the area businesses and residents. In fact, some business owners were experiencing extraordinary amounts of vandalisms, which resulted in lost income. This was also true for residents who were frustrated with finding beer bottles and various other types of trash in their front yards.

Most of the people involved in the cruising situation range from teenagers to adults whose main goals were one of several. The main reason for cruising is to socialize! They see cruising as a way of meeting new people. Some cruise to show off their cars. (One last reason for cruising is that some teenagers expressed that this was the only type of fun activity for them to do, and that Wichita was limited with teenage activities.) For the most part cruising could be a positive experience for most cruisers, but there were also drawbacks. (These included: being victims themselves to such crimes as vandalism and assaults.) Cruisers also risked the chance of receiving a citation for having their stereo too loud or for loitering in the parking lots.

Some main negative aspects of cruising were that most area residents felt intimidated by the large groups of teenagers gathering in the local parking lots. (Some residents knew better than to try to go to the local grocery store on a Friday or Saturday night.) Traffic on South Seneca could also be a nightmare, especially if you were pressed for time. Basically, the long lines of cruisers became a hassle for people traveling through to other destinations, such as work or home. There are several turn around points on South Seneca that the cruisers use. This causes a traffic problem for the area residents and businesses. Some residents also became frustrated when they were inside enjoying what they thought was going to be a peaceful evening and to then be almost shaken out of their chair by the loud bass coming from the cars cruising on South Seneca. Some

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residents would call 911 about the music, but most knew that this was hopeless because the car would be gone by the time police arrived. Because of all the above-mentioned problems this resulted in strained relationships between the cruisers themselves, area businesses, and residents.

Generally, traditional enforcement strategies has always been used to address the cruising which resulted in traffic tickets and arrests. Enforcement strategies lead to special assignment teams being assigned to South Seneca every weekend. The officers looked for traffic violations, curfew violations, and loitering violations. It was the same routine every weekend. Meaning; police officers doing traditional enforcement, which resulted in the cruisers coming back to Seneca to cruise. Officers cited many of the cruisers for various traffic infractions. The cruisers seemed to develop quite a negative attitude toward law enforcement. Some cruisers would receive more than one ticket. However, this was not a problem to them since there was another Friday and Saturday night to look forward to. Some cruisers would pay a majority of the citations with no hesitation, while others allowed them to turn into warrants. What we soon found out was that no matter how much police presence there was on South Seneca and tickets written the cruisers would still come back. Overall, the relationships between the police and the cruisers was very poor.

Some businesses feel that the cruising resulted in positive benefits for their perspective businesses. On Friday and Saturday nights they would notice an increase in sales, whether it was at a fast food restaurant or at the local car wash. Some cruisers were cruising not to be a nuisance but to legitimately show off their cars that they had worked long and hard to customize.

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Some might think that the cruising ritual is not a big deal, unless you actually live in the cruising area, or operate a business. Many residents considered putting their houses up for sale or even selling their businesses. This was due to the cruising ritual every weekend. Some residents did not feel safe in their neighborhoods and would often stay locked up in their homes on weekends.

Traditionally, cruising usually takes place on the weekends. The hours are generally between 9:00 P.M. -12:00 A.M.. There are a handful who do cruise into the later hours. Most businesses and residents notice a decrease in cruisers around midnight, mainly because of the curfew law. Apparently more people are not as apt to get out of their cars during the cold winter months.

I started attending community meetings to get a better understanding on how people felt about the cruising. The Southwest Neighborhood Association was the first to come forward and say there was some concern with the cruising, and they wanted to be a part of the solution. The Association handed several hundred flyers out in which citizens and businesses were encouraged to attend a separate meeting from the Southwest Neighborhood Association to discuss cruising concerns. At each meeting we had good participation and ideas from the citizens.

Some ranges of responses considered were to do more traditional enforcement, Neighborhood watches, and Citizens on Patrol. The area residents wanted to take back their neighborhood.

Some of the residents thought of some of these ideas, however, when it came down to participating in neighborhood patrol, some of the residents felt they were too old or intimidated

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by the cruisers. The special assignments continued, with the same results. The cruisers seemed to think that they were being picked on and began to resent the police officers. Since this was not helping anybody, we then went to the cruisers themselves. By this time we had established two partnerships. The first with the Southwest Neighborhood Association and the second with the Street Outreach, (a program through the Wichita Children's Home.) We teamed up together and went out on a Friday night and conducted a survey with the cruisers themselves. Some questions asked were; Why do you cruise? What are some alternatives to cruising? We set up at one of the largest turn around points, in order for everyone to see us. We handed out free pop to all the participants, which was donated by Street Outreach/Wichita Childrens Home. This survey indicated that there were only a handful of people causing the problems on South Seneca. We also learned that the cruisers would welcome alternatives, such as, car shows, on South Seneca.

The first event was a Pizza Party, which we held at one of the local shopping centers. At this event, Papa Johns Pizza donated pizza for the whole crowd and pop was donated again by Street Outreach/Wichita Childrens Home. The cruisers were very receptive and somewhat amazed to see police officers mingling among them.

The next and most popular event was a Car Show. We held it at Seneca Square parking lot, which was somewhat ironic because the owner was very leary of allowing the cruisers to come onto the property. This was because of the past vandalism, loitering, and littering. The owner, stated that he had paid thousands of dollars by hiring off duty police officers and having speed bumps put in the parking lot, in order to keep cruisers off his lot. He reluctantly agreed to allow the car show to be held on his lot stating, "I will take a gamble on this!" Fortunately,

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because of the owner's "Gamble" we were allowed to return for two more car shows. Since this event he has been very supportive and always welcomes future car shows. He has also stated that vandalism had reduced greatly to his property. The car shows were always a huge success, ranging from thirty to sixty entries. The car shows were planned by Community Policing, Southwest Neighborhood Association and Street Outreach. Several South Seneca businesses donated items for prizes and were very supportive of the idea. Our main goal was to have interaction with the cruisers and at the same time distribute educational flyers.

There were other events held over the summer, including a low rider hydraulics demonstration and an end of the summer party at a local park. We supplied each event with pizza and beverages for everyone who participated. Also, there were prizes supplied from various businesses for car shows. On some weekends other community volunteers and I would distribute flyers to cruisers at the turn around points. The flyers were designed by myself and the Cruise Control members. The subject of the flyers ranged from, information about loud music ordinance to curfew laws. The flyers were very informative and suggested ways to keep the crime down while cruising.

Another way to prevent traffic problems was to put up barricades at certain locations to deter traffic congestion. On most Friday and Saturdays the special assignment officers or the reserve officers would put up the barricades. We would experiment by placing the barricades at different locations to decrease the amount of traffic congestion. By doing this we are preventing crime and traffic problems through environmental design.

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The main criteria as far as implementation of the response was that this was something different, and something that we had not tried before and it had the possibility of working for all involved.

The main goal we wanted to achieve was for the community, businesses, and cruisers to understand each others concerns about cruising. If the cruising was to continue in this neighborhood in a safe manner, there had to be communication between everyone involved. Apparently there were two different sides to the cruising; either you did not mind it or you hated it.

Some main goals to be accomplished were to help the community and the cruisers to have a better understanding of each other's concerns, i.e.: when the cruisers have their music too loud, which in turn disturbs the residents who are trying to sleep or simply enjoy their evening at home. The businesses also experienced a decrease in vandalism which was the result of handing out many flyers. By handing out flyers, cruisers were made aware of what was happening, such as the vandalism, littering, and loitering.

In order for our efforts to be successful we had to have support form the community and the businesses together. The residents worked very hard by attending different events during the summer and handing out flyers to as many cruisers as possible. Several residents, including the President of the South West Neighborhood Association; pounded the pavement in search of donations for car shows and different events. The media was also very supportive, by following the progress and printing both sides of the story. A committee was also formed called the,

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"Cruise Control Committee." Different volunteers whom initially contacted the cruisers by getting their names and addresses formed this committee. We sent out notices to advise the cruisers that we were forming a committee concerning cruising. The committee would discuss ways to improve the problems related to cruising and ways to help with different events. At first the group met every week at a local church to discuss ways of improving problems related to cruising. We took turns planning different events. There are approximately twenty-five members who come from various backgrounds and cultures to attend the meetings. A majority of our members belong to car clubs and are very interested in preserving their "cruising rights." Some car clubs involved in helping have been the Latino Dreams, Short Stack, and Down Low. The members of the different clubs worked together to improve cruising on South Seneca.

Some first difficulties experienced with the project was being able to find enough time to get everything finished, for example: car shows and pizza party. Once the Cruise Control Committee formed it seemed to run a lot smoother. The community was willing to try anything and was very supportive.

The most noticeable result was the willingness of the community and cruisers to work together as a team. The cruisers had a much better understanding of why the residents were so frustrated with the cruising taking place in their neighborhood and the residents had a much better understanding of why people cruise all together. Having people working together instead of against each other, makes for a happier community. The results ranged from decreased vandalism and assaults which were two of the main concerns of the community and businesses.

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The businesses on South Seneca had experienced numerous vandalism to their property and some had even exhausted their insurance premiums, which led to even more frustrations. Most of the damage sustained to the businesses were broken windows and graffiti. The greatest experience was to see a group of people working together.

One of the methods of evaluation was a survey that was done with the neighborhood and the South Seneca businesses. I attended as many community meetings as possible to hear feedback from residents. During these meetings I would hear what the residents were experiencing in their neighborhoods, and if it was positive or negative. On some instances if I had received more than the usual negative feedback I would arrange a special meeting. This meeting would be solely dedicated to any concerns the residents might have on South Seneca. During these meetings we would write concerns down and then try and come up with solutions. Flyers would be distributed to get as many people as possible to these meetings. Local businesses would also help distribute flyers by displaying them in their stores or putting a flyer in grocery bags. Basically, this project was evaluated throughout the process. Statistics would be checked on a regular basis to see if there was any unusual activity that happened over the weekend or any other incidents that should receive special attention. All persons or businesses living in the South Seneca area were involved in the evaluation. Cruisers were not forgotten either, as they were also part of the evaluation process. As far as problems go when implementing the response plan there were those who believed that the cruisers should be left alone and the police department should only look at it as an enforcement issue. Some businesses felt that if the cruisers were encouraged

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to quit cruising South Seneca their business might possibly be affected. Although, some businesses felt that the cruisers were more of a threat to their business because of vandalism, littering, and loitering. These businesses felt that the cruisers were intimidating their legionary "family" customers. Others felt that the problems related to cruising had been going on for so long that nothing could be done to try and reduce the amount of problems related to cruising. Yet, still there were even fellow officers who felt that this project was a waste of time and thought that the only way to discourage this type of behavior was to do traditional enforcement. After the summer of 1997 we began to see a noticeable improvement with the cruising situation. First of all and most important the cruisers and the community were working together to try and reduce the problems related to cruising. To actually see these two groups work together was a great experience for all involved. There were many meetings to attend and at each meeting relationships were being built one by one. There was a new understanding of how the cruisers viewed the problem and how the community viewed the problems related to cruising. The cruisers have always felt that they had every right to cruise and were oblivious to any problems it caused for the community. Mainly, it appeared as though there were only a handful of cruisers causing the problems and after realizing this it was apparent that the cruisers who did not abide by the rules would eventually go away because of the peer pressure.

Another improvement noted was that the vandalisms and assaults decreased by a large percentage. The area residents also felt that they were able to go out on the weekends and not feel so intimidated by the cruisers. There were several events in which we would actually have the

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community involved in. One such event was a drivers license checklane held on South Seneca. Not only were there police officers out checking for valid drivers licenses, but citizens from the community volunteered their time by assisting with handing out flyers and conducting surveys with the cruisers. After officers finished with the driver, the car would then proceed to a group of volunteers who would then issue coupons for free drinks and hamburgers. These coupons were donated by local businesses on South Seneca. It was a chance for everybody to get together and meet their neighbors and the cruisers on a more positive aspect.

Some of the methods used for evaluating were mainly using surveys. The surveys were directed at all parties involved. Feedback from the community was important also. I would generally get this from attending neighborhood meetings and listening to what the citizens had to say. It was also important to know how the cruisers felt about the changes and what was taking place. On several different occasions I wrote articles in the local high school papers. Usually the articles talked about how the affects of cruising were affecting a neighborhood and what cruisers could do to correct the problem. I always encouraged the students to get involved and attend the Cruise Control meetings. Although some were reluctant to get involved at least I felt that the students understood that this was a community problem and not just an incident where the teenagers felt like they were being singled out and harassed. On several different occasions members from the Cruise Control committee and I visited with local high school classrooms. We would discuss cruising and the affects cruising had on the community. There were three main schools that we visited with, which were identified through surveys as having the most students

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cruising from individual schools. Most of the students were receptive, while others still did not quite understand the problem related to cruising. I feel that it was a definite learning experience for both sides.

There was a definite concern about pushing the problem to another location. It was very possible that relocation could result and we did not want this to occur. The main reason for this was because the cruising had already been on South Seneca for quite some time and to move the cruising would not solve anything. If the cruising moved to another location it would be like starting over again and not knowing what to expect.

At this point in the project we will continue to monitor the cruising and organize different events, such as car shows. At one point there had been some talk of a Cruising Ordinance, which would prohibit cruising all together. This ordinance has apparently been used in other cities, with some negative and positive results. We wanted to be fair to everybody involved and decided that we would present the ordinance to neighborhood associations city wide. To be honest, we were somewhat surprised when the cruising ordinance was rejected by the community. By forming the Cruise Control committee the burden of planning everything has been somewhat lifted off of me and is now a group effort. Before the committee I would basically organize all events, with only a couple of other people helping. Now I have a wealth of people helping and wanting to get involved. I will continue to work with the business district as well and encourage them to become involved in the community efforts also. This is a very strong community and we will continue to do what is best for the community. There could come a day when the Cruise Control committee is not needed. Until then we will continue our strive for a safe neighborhood.

## AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

The level that the South Seneca project started within the Wichita Police Department was basically with the Patrol/Beat officers. These officers were the main beat officers for the South Seneca area and obviously dealt with the Cruising problem every weekend. As I mentioned before, traditional enforcement was always used and when this did not change the actions of the cruisers this became frustrating for both sides. After becoming a Community Policing Officer I was informed of the concerns and knew that something different needed to be implemented.

As a Community Policing Officer I did receive special training for this job title, along with all other Community Policing Officers. Patrol Officers have also been through similar training and most have a close working relationship with their perspective Community Policing Officer. For example, if I need assistance with a project, the beat officer I am assigned to always volunteers to assist as much as he/she possibly can.

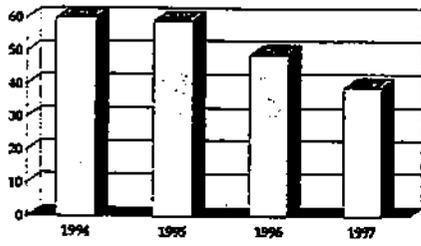
The main incentive for these officers was being afforded the opportunity to be involved with this project, which in turn brought them more awareness of what was going on in the community. The officers had the option to most cases to modify their hours so that they could assist with a car show or other event, which would in return open the doors for better communication.

Resources used in the South Seneca project were all donated by area businesses. We are very proud of this, as businesses were always very willing to help out.

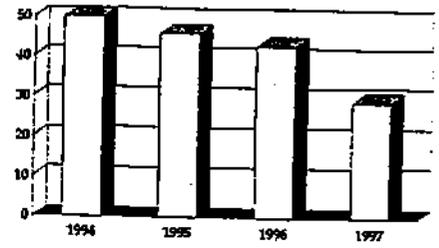
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*Simple Assaults*



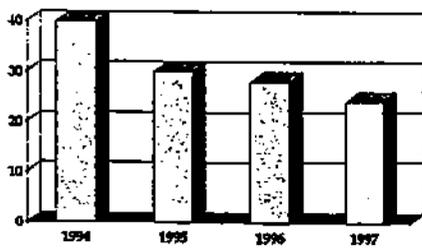
*Vandalism*



*Commercial House Robberies*



*Other Larcenies*



*Total Crime Statistics*

