What Is the Bahia Lakes Neighborhood Watch Program?

Very few people are in a position to protect their homes and property 100% of the time. Vacation, business, and shopping trips, or even an evening out will leave homes unattended and vulnerable to theft.

The Bahia Lakes Neighborhood Watch Program (BLNWP) is a Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office (HCSO) sponsored program of mutual assistance among Bahia Lakes’ neighbors watching other neighbors' property. The program is aimed at reducing crime in the community at the grass roots level. It involves getting to know one’s neighbors and introducing them to the concept of Neighborhood Crime Watch – that is good neighbors working together, alert to the potential of crime, and willing to look out for one another’s interests.

Neighbors working together through the Neighborhood Watch Program can combat crime in their area the most effective way – BEFORE IT STARTS!

Residents offer an open invitation to criminals every day when they leave their doors unlocked, advertise their absence from home with an unlit house, piled up newspapers, or leave car keys in the ignition. When formulating a crime control strategy, one must consider which course is more effective and less costly: hundreds of law enforcement personnel in every neighborhood and a guard at every door – OR – ADEQUATE LIGHTING, SECURE HOMES AND WATCHFUL NEIGHBORS. It would appear that crime prevention is the most logical and most economical approach to take in crime control.

BLNWP provides a means of reducing the opportunity for crime to occur, through the active participation of our residents in crime prevention. Residents are informed on how to make their homes less of an attractive target for thieves, how to participate in Operations Identification, making their property less desirable to thieves, and how to be alert to suspicious activity in the neighborhood.

BLNWP is thousands of eyes and ears of residents organized together in groups to provide a highly effect way to join in with local law enforcement and report suspicious activities or crimes to the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office and fellow BLNWP participants.

One important criterion to ensure a well maintained Neighborhood Watch Program is to have maximum participation!! Community participation is one of the most effective tools against crime because the job of stopping burglary, robbery or sexual assault is impossible for the Sheriff’s office to accomplish alone. Crime watchers are networks of neighbors informed by Community Outreach deputies in home and self-protection, suspect identification and how to serve effectively as additional eyes and ears for law enforcement agencies in our community.

Neighborhood Watch members provide a way for neighbors to help one another by keeping an eye on each other’s homes and property. A secured Facebook site for Bahia Lakes is set up to enable neighbors to keep one another informed of any suspicious activity and to receive information from the Sheriff’s Office concerning descriptions of suspected criminals and other pertinent information.

When a member of BLNWP sees a person or vehicle engaged in suspicious activity, he or she should call the Sheriff's Office immediately and then follow-up by posting to the community NWP Facebook page.
How Does Neighborhood Watch Help?

Sheriff's deputies cannot be everywhere all of the time. Besides, even if they happen to be passing by, they cannot recognize that a car, a truck, or people do not belong in an area. However, those who live in a community will know if there are strangers in the area.

The BLNWP is of great help to our Sheriff's Office. There have been many instances where good neighbors, by reporting unusual activities, have been instrumental in the apprehension of criminals. What the program needs to be effective is an alert and aware neighborhood willing to summon the Sheriff's Office when they observe a crime or suspicious activity and direct sheriff's deputies to the area or address where a crime is being committed or about to be committed. If our neighbors are able and willing to do this, our property may be protected and eventually criminal elements will soon learn that our neighborhood is not 'easy pickins'.

How Does Neighborhood Watch Work?

Neighborhood Watch works through mutual aid, neighbors watching out for neighbors. Neighbors know who you are, what type of car you own, and may be the first to notice a burglar at your window or door, or a strange car in your driveway. Participants in BLNWP should create a Facebook account if they don’t already have one. By using a “Secret” Facebook Group the Coordinator, Block Captains and Block Watchers are able to keep each other and fellow residents informed of safety and security issues affecting Bahia Lakes residents in a timely manner.

What to do if You See Something Suspicious . . .

- Write down the description of the suspicious person(s). Get the make model, color and license number of strange vehicles. Contact the Sheriff's Office by phone and inform other members of our Neighborhood Watch group immediately by posting to our Facebook page.
- You should never attempt to apprehend a suspect. This is the Law Enforcement Officer's Job.

If You Are Going Away, Leave the following information with a trusted friend or neighbor:

- Where you are going
- How you can be reached in case of an emergency.
- When you expect to return.
- If anybody will be at your home. (gardener, repairman, etc.)

What Else Can You Do?

- Cancel the newspaper deliveries.
- Have the Post Office hold your mail, or have it collected by a neighbor, friend or relative.
- Store items of exceptional value in a safe place such as a safety deposit box.
- Notify the Sheriff's Office of your absence and request a "Vacation Watch" for your home.
- Use clock timers to activate lights, radios, etc., to give your home that "lived in" look.
Are You Still Skeptical?

Well then walk from window to window in your home. You will notice that your vision can cover a considerable area. If you listed or otherwise knew the street address and directions from your residence of all that you could see, it can become easy to understand how much of your neighborhood you alone could protect!

Suspicious Incidents

You may become aware of something that is out of ordinary that you may feel is leading up to some type of criminal activity. This is your chance to prevent crime in your neighborhood. Remember, what is suspicious to you may not be to someone else. Don't hesitate to call law enforcement; better safe than sorry.

Types of Crime

- Theft: Taking of another's property.
- Burglary: Illegally entering a structure, such as a house, trailer, shed, or garage.
- Vandalism: (Criminal Mischief) Damaging another's property with criminal intent.
- Trespassing: Being on someone else's property without their permission.
- Prowler: Someone trespassing with malicious intent.
- Robbery: Taking property of another by use of fear, force or weapon.

Procedure for Reporting to Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office When Witnessing a Crime in Progress

- Call directly to the HCSO emergency phone number--9-1-1.
- Say, "I would like to report a... (type of incident)."
- Give the correct house number, street name and closest major intersection. (May also add color of home or vehicle in driveway.)
- Give a complete description of the suspect and the suspect's vehicle, including tag number when possible.
- Stay on the line until the operator advises she has all the information; remember to ask for an "event number".
DUTIES OF BAHIA LAKES NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH BLOCK CAPTAINS

1. Block Captains shall compile a list of all those on his/her assigned block who wish to participate, as well as their addresses and telephone numbers.

2. Block Captains shall relay information from the BLNWP Coordinator to back-up Captains in the block. If one of the persons is not at home try at another time.

3. Block Captains shall distribute literature to Block Watchers when necessary.

4. Block Captains shall assist the BLNWP Coordinator with meetings.

5. Block Captains should maintain a list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of other Block Captains in the neighborhood.

6. Block Captains shall report to the BLNWP Coordinator any arrest resulting from information from Block Watchers and any suspicious vehicles or persons.