

National Night Out Fights Crime

Hunter's Green residents and Tampa public safety officials turned out big Tuesday, Aug. 2, to celebrate the 28th annual event meant to spread crime prevention and awareness.

By Rory Crump

Hunter's Green celebrated National Night Out Against Crime with a picnic that brought together a healthy collection of residents and representatives from **Tampa Police**, **Tampa Fire Rescue** and the **Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office**.

The balmy Tuesday evening held in Captain Nathaniel Hunter Park was part of the 28th annual nationwide event promoting crime prevention and community awareness.

National Night Out is a "celebration of community where Hunter's Green residents meet all the people who can help them," said Jeff Cobb, president of the Hunter's Green Community Association.

James Lombardi, crime watch coordinator for Hunter's Green, called the concept — building partnerships between residents and public safety — community policing. And successful crime prevention is a two-way street. "Officers get to know the people in the neighborhood," Lombardi said. "They establish contact that makes their job easier."

The party, held from 6-8 p.m., saw police officers laughing with residents, kids touring a fire truck and a police horse prancing. And don't forget the bomb squad van — serious crime prevention.

Under the park's shady trees and spacious pavilion, the scene was a neighborhood mixer and knowledge exchange organized by volunteers. **Marco's Pizza**, 20305 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., gave away boxes of pizza. And the raffle seemed so generous that almost everyone must have won something.

But to the Tampa public safety community, it's not all fun and games. Neighborhood-watch programs are working, and the communal concept of fighting crime is a great way to maximize resources, they said.

"Work smarter, not harder," said Deputy Chris DePolis of the **Hillsborough County Sheriff's**

Office.

As part of the Community Outreach Division, DePolis advocates neighborhood-watch programs and sees tremendous value in National Night Out. The programs create a network of contacts fundamental to spreading crime prevention and awareness. And it starts with getting to know your neighbor, so that “anything unknown sticks out like a sore thumb,” DePolis said.

The Tampa Police Department also embraces National Night Out, claiming the event shows support for anti-crime groups and strengthens partnerships between neighborhoods and the police community. And more directly, it sends “a message to criminals letting them know that neighborhoods are organized and fighting back.”

National Night Out was held in multiple neighborhoods throughout Tampa. Police Chief Jane Castor was scheduled to appear at four locations. And according to **nationalnightout.org**, NNO is now a global phenomenon, with last year’s event attracting “37 million people, in 15,110 communities from all 50 states, U.S. territories, Canadian cities, and military bases worldwide.” **Target** is a national corporate sponsor of the event.

But the real action takes place on the streets, houses and backyards of places like Hunter’s Green with support at the grassroots level. Places where concerned citizens like Josh Boddiford are using the power and speed of digital media to beat criminals to the crime.

Hunter’s Green Neighborhood Watch manages a website for announcements, statistics and contact information, and Boddiford is developing a Facebook page with the compounding effects of social media in mind.

“Use the Facebook page to combine the neighborhood association and community watch as a common portal to spread information,” said Boddiford.

Think globally, act locally — the essence of both National Night Out and neighborhood-watch programs.

As the sun began to set on Hunter’s Green National Night Out, the party raged on. More raffle winners, more pizza and more genuine goodwill between public safety and neighborhood watchers.

A perfect night for future safety.