

ACONA Meeting Notes January 26, 2021

Topic: Crime in Altadena

Panel:

Captain Marjory Jacobs, Altadena Sheriff's Station

Paul Livingstone, Soul Force Project — using diverse music to celebrate alternatives to violence

Dominick Correy, District Representative, Sen. Portantino's Office

Brian Biery, Flintridge Center

Nina Ehlig, SENCH neighborhood association

Panel members' background and experience

Capt.: The uptick in gang violence: 10 firearm assaults last year, five on 12/20 within a two-hour span, definitely gang-related. The department has lots of resources that can be called into Altadena, detectives are doing investigation here and working with Pasadena. Need the community's help. Others on the panel will be giving guidance on how the community can help. Crime Stoppers is a way of making an anonymous tip.

Paul: Musician, composer, educator, went to Eliot, Muir. Has lived most of his life in Altadena. Peacemaker, activist. Racial justice coalition Dena United: Compassionate Arts in Action and My Tribe Rise.

Dominick: Born and raised in Pasadena, was involved in gangs as a youth. Helped start Learning Works Charter School, which serves at-risk teens. Has done tutoring, gang intervention. Still involved with gang intervention/prevention groups.

Brian: No longer with Flintridge, but worked there for 8 years. Born and raised in Pasadena and lived in Altadena for ten years. Went to Blair HS, worked in Latin America for several years which gave him an interesting perspective on relations between the US and other countries, including immigrant flows and gang activity. Worked with Neighborhood Connections forming neighborhood associations in Pasadena. Is an adjunct professor at Pacific Oaks College teaching social justice, advocacy, and human development.

Nina: Has lived in Altadena for 38 years, is a chairperson of SENCH, community Neighborhood Watch association in Census Tract 4610. Veronica Jones is her town council rep; she is also a street captain within SENCH (160 households). Nina and SENCH co-chair Carlotta Martin are members of the Altadena Sheriff's Station's Community Advisory Committee. SENCH's aim is promoting a healthy neighborhood using hand-delivered monthly newsletter and monthly meetings. Captain Jacobs is invited to all of their meetings. "See something, say something" is a motto they take seriously.

Q&A:

Deb Halberstdt:

1. What can individuals of our community do to help lessen gang violence in Altadena other than report suspicious activity to the LASD?

Paul: Need to know our neighbors, be out talking to them about common issues. Dena United is making those connections, using the arts. Providing opportunity for young people to get together and relate through art and music. Kids are involved in gangs as pre-teenagers.

Dominick: Alta Pasa has hundreds of nonprofits that deal with some of these issues. Need to put actions to words. Donate, support the schools. Covid has caused kids to have a lot of free time which contributes to gang activity.

Brian: Prevention, intervention, education, family cohesion (healthy, supportive family nucleus), neighborhood connectedness, therapeutic intervention for victims of trauma and depression, reintegration, life skills, support network, job development, healthcare,

housing, transportation, drug treatment, outreach workers on the street to work with gang members. To insure we have less crime overall, need to be fair, equitable, treat all with dignity, have access to education, careers, health care, housing, protection of human and civil rights.

Nina: Big fan of the C word: Communication. The Sheriff's station website has a sidebar link to all the neighborhood watch associations in Altadena.

Sue Koskey:

2. What are indications of gang presence in our neighborhood?

Brian: Lack of people: in neighborhoods that are less safe, the public space is not used. Feeling of distance between neighbors, lack of community fabric that allows neighbors to bond and develop trust. Feelings of anxiety/fear: residents afraid to call government/authorities for fear of retaliation or being caught as an innocent bystander.

Dominick: Gangs can be both good and bad. Role models around youth might influence them to do "bad" things. Tagging crews, cliques, scare crews are all considered gangs, so in many neighborhoods there are what might be considered gangs. Gang violence is a whole other issue. In neighborhoods where there are a lot of liquor stores, where the streets aren't kept up, lower socioeconomics, people hanging out in the park, those are signs of gang presence.

3. What are security measures that could protect from gang violence to property and persons?

Capt. Jacobs: Don't become a victim of a crime of opportunity. Be aware of your surroundings, be in good lighting, walk with a partner. Property crime: good lighting, cameras, security systems are helpful. Use common sense.

Paul: Need to think of security in a wholistic way: include everyone. Why do we have crime? Do the perpetrators feel insecure? They are also members of the community. There is still racism; how does that affect security?

Dominick: We can't out-police this problem. It takes the community, mental health services, education system, drug/alcohol counseling, employment. When I got a job, I was too tired to go to the park and hang out with the homies. Jobs provide validation as well as income.

Brian: Form neighborhood groups. Bring people together around a positive activity: block parties, cleanup days, yard sales, tree trimming, lighting (Christmas Tree Lane). Be out in the neighborhood — walk! Be present; be engaged. Take back the street. If there's a problem property on the street, there are legal ways of taking care of it besides law enforcement, through Small Claims Court. Safe Streets Now is a program for gang and drug houses. Social contract: improving relationships between people so you care about them instead of being afraid of them.

4. What and how to report suspected gang presence in the neighbor hood?

Capt. Jacobs: If there's a crime, call law enforcement immediately. (Anonymously through Crime Stoppers is an option.) Dispatchers are trained to ask questions. Give as much description as you can. Get license plate info. Be a good witness.

Dominick: If people are just hanging out, not committing a crime, don't call the police. It's not a crime to just hang out in the park. Finding the older members with street credibility who can talk to the younger gang members and wannabes can make a difference — turn the youth into community helpers.

5. To what public entities should neighbors advise of violence and gang activity in their area?

Paul: We need to lead in saying that calling the police because someone is just hanging out is not all right. Don't assume guilt because of the color of a person's skin or the way

they dress. Allow people to be themselves. Dena United is talking about setting up a “peace riders” group as an alternative to law enforcement, to talk to people in the park. There’s a lack of trust between people of color and the Sheriff’s department.

Brian: “Public entities” is broader than government groups. Are there people in the neighborhood who are having trouble/suffering? Contact faith groups as an early choice. Community Clergy Coalition in Altadena/Pasadena has an intervention team. Pastor Manning is the chair. Contact a non-profit that might be able to help (Flintridge Center, Learning Works Charter School, Homeboys Industries—Father Greg Boyle). Talk to their outreach staff about how to talk to your neighbors, or bring them to your community. Bring in your elected officials; tell them of your hopes, needs, desires regarding public policy; hold them accountable. Dominick is a good resource.

6. What response can we expect following a report of gang activity and personal/property violence?

Capt. Jacobs: A deputy takes a report, might make an arrest; will follow up as necessary to solve a crime. Operation Safe Streets comes out to deal with gangs.

Paul: Dena United and particularly Heavenly Hughes and Victor Hodgson (My Tribe Rise) have been involved in the streets working with tribe matters and problems. Are doing redemptive justice work, trying to keep people out of prison and a more positive influence in the community.

Dominick: The recent shootings are gang violence; call the police. Everyone wants to feel safe in their home and their neighborhood. Not every property crime in Altadena is gang-related. Catalytic converter theft is not a gang-related crime. People hanging out at hiking trails are probably not gang members; that’s not typical gang activity. Judy Chu’s office, Supervisor Barger’s office, and the Altadena Town Council are others that can help address the issue as policy makers/advisors.

7. Advise on how to organize a neighborhood response to threats of violence by gangs and individuals.

Capt. Jacobs: Report crimes immediately, especially if there’s a gang shooting. Cooperate with the deputies who respond to the call. Accurate, timely information is crucial. If you’re afraid of retaliation, you can report anonymously; you can meet the deputies outside of Altadena. Deputies can’t monitor Next Door. Reporting something on Next Door or Facebook is not enough; call the police!

Jill Vig:

8. I would like to know the current status of our Sheriff's Department. Obviously it has not been closed, as was threatened, but has the staff been reduced? And if so, by how much?

Capt. Jacobs: Back in the summer the Sheriff was going to consolidate Altadena and Crescenta Valley stations. That didn’t happen. Staff hasn’t been reduced, but three deputies have been moved back into the field rather than doing special tasks (Community Relations, School Resource, Search/Rescue Coordinator). Trying to get the positions that had to be vacated contracted back into the station. The station is open 24/7, and the lobby is open and the light is on. Come see us.

9. What is the status of the officers who were doing outreach to homeless people in Altadena?

Capt. Jacobs: Started with HOST (homeless outreach teams) Deputy and a mental-health social worker, doing outreach, but went from 32 teams to 4 teams countywide due to budget issues. The team that serves Altadena has a service area from Diamond Bar to Crescenta Valley.

Dominick: Union Station is in Altadena now, located at Lincoln & Woodbury, and is available to serve homeless people. If you see homeless people, you can contact them.

10. Is there any group of officers who are working with at-risk youth?

Capt. Jacobs: Still have program that deals with at-risk youth, working in Altadena-Pasadena area with about 36 kids. Have had to do it virtually during the pandemic. Still do home checks, but can't go in the house. Used to do a physical fitness class before Covid. Building a virtual class right now. Two teams in South LA had to be discontinued, but Altadena is holding onto theirs.

Kathy Musial:

11. There has been a great increase in property crime lately, in particular vehicle thefts and break ins, and catalytic convertor thefts.

Capt. Jacobs: Probably ten out of ten cars that get broken into are parked on the street. If you can park off the street in a well-lit area, that would be good. Catalytic converter thefts are quick, but they are very loud. If you hear something, call. Significant decrease in residential home burglaries, probably because people are at home, one benefit of Covid. Violent crimes are ticking up, homicides are up, but other serious crime is down. Re uptick in violence: It's occurring all over the county, not just in Altadena. Homicides are up. Altadena was under the county numbers, but there was still an increase.

Laura Berthold Monteros:

12. With the emphasis on "see something, say something" and other aphorisms that encourage citizens to be in contact with law enforcement, what are your concrete ideas and plans to proactively reach out to neighborhoods to establish/reestablish Neighborhood Watch groups? Would you consider moving from the "block" plan, which is not effective in most cases, so a broader "several blocks" plan?

Nina: SENCH has always been a "several blocks" plan. I don't know of any other type of association, but every community has its own approach. Go to the link in the Sheriff's station sidebar and take a look at the neighborhood associations. SENCH has monthly newsletter, monthly Zoom meetings. Is available to discuss how to start a wider Neighborhood Watch. Pre-Covid, SENCH was inviting people to the meetings so they could see how SENCH operated. Happy to have people attend the Zoom meetings.

13. Currently, the burden is entirely on residents in a limited area to establish Neighborhood Watch for their block. I don't think this is working. I understand it would be difficult to implement a more proactive approach before the lockdown is lifted, but that gives you time to organize.

Nina: SENCH has been around for 51 years. Since Covid, has evolved to Zoom. "If we can do it, anyone can do it!" Many community members have only landline phones, but they have evolved, and are involved with the Zoom meetings.

Paul: Never been involved with Neighborhood Watch. Proactive approaches, difficult but doable: Walking for Peace, food give-aways, initiative with Compassionate Arts in Action called When Black and Brown Go Green to do gardening/ecological work, Paint Dena Green mural project, drum circle, Charles White Park Art Project. Doing things together is more humanizing than looking out the window and calling the police when there's a problem. Need to do that too, but need to be more compassionate and connected.

Brian: Covid makes it more difficult for sure. We used to have a barbecue block party; not this year. Face-to-face relationship building is important. Makes a distinction between Neighborhood Watch and Neighborhood Associations. One is focused on public safety, the other is broader based, relationship-oriented. Ways to organize: Throw a party. Food is a great way to bring folks together. Map Your Neighborhood is a

good way to build a communications web. Yard sales, potlucks, concerts, gardening together are good community-building activities. Say “Hi” to people on your block. Talk to the neighborhood kids. Give people something to do so they feel a sense of belonging: phone tree for example.

Juliana Erdody:

14. I was told by one of the deputies that the station will not close down. Is this still true, and if so, are there any plans in the works to shave down the number of staff at the Altadena Station? Will Captain Jacobs remain? Other staff?

Capt. Jacobs: Already addressed this. And I’m still here.

15. On a related note, are there changes coming to the Altadena Station that will impact the work they are currently doing, particularly as it relates to youth and gangs? Are mental health professionals and resources being made available to the department to assist them in their work? If not, do plans exist to add this dimension to the department services?

Capt. Jacobs: Many of these questions have already been answered. Mental health, homelessness, drug addiction are all intertwined; cutting resources has not helped the situation. Altadena Station has a good Explorer program at the station; have had up to 10 kids involved, overseen by the Search & Rescue deputy. With the loss of that position, had to send them over to Crescenta Valley. Working on bringing them back.

16. What changes can the department envision that will help to bring the recent increase in violence in Altadena under control, and what can we do to support this process?

Capt. Jacobs: Working with the Board of Supervisors, Fifth District on this. Used to have a dedicated gang car with two detectives, working with the older homies, as Dominick called them. Special problems team is also now working regular patrol. It’s hard to pinpoint and work on a specific areas when deputies are responding to so many regular calls. Neighborhoods are the backbone: call if you see something suspicious.

Janet West:

17. Would panel describe what efforts have been or will be made to identify gang leaders and try to interact with them to break cycle of retaliation. Is this something police gang task force did in the past? Or is there a nonprofit group that does this?

Paul: The best people to speak to this question are the people doing the Peace Walks, Heavenly Hughes and Victor Hodgson, who understand the subculture, and can talk and be heard.

Dominick: Helped start Learning Works Charter School, and for ten years was a “chaser” — helping round up kids and get them to school. Still involved on a wider level, working with Sen. Portantino at the policy level. There’s a gap: When there’s a lot of violence, we react instead of doing the prevention work. Flintridge Center addresses this prevention/intervention/recidivism arm. They’ve trained street outreach workers to serve the community.

Brian: Pasadena-Altadena Reintegration Council: serves people coming out of prison, who have a severe lack of resources. Provides a network of community-based organizations — churches, government agencies — to help and give them hope. Apprenticeship Preparation Program from Flintridge Center trains people to be ready to work practically, psychologically, and emotionally, to find a career, not just a job. Connecting with gang leaders: a clergy committee goes to Huntington Hospital and to families’ homes to try to break the retaliation cycle after a gang violence event.

Capt. Jacobs: Partnership with My Tribe Rise has been very beneficial. Law enforcement is not the fix-all. There's so much out in the community that can be brought to the issue.

18. How many gang members are estimated to live in Altadena? Are there maps of different gang territory?

Capt. Jacobs: A couple of different gangs, branches of the Crips and Bloods, who predominately live in Pasadena. They are active mostly on the west side of Altadena; there are some Hispanic gangs south of Woodbury. Bloods are southwest Altadena, Crips are northwest Altadena. Boundaries are fluid. Don't have the exact number of members.

19. It seems that recent shootings have targeted specific houses. Is this correct? Or were the shootings random? Or car to car? Or do they target hangouts? (Is one of those Fair Oaks Burger?)

Capt. Jacobs: Ten aggravated assaults (assaults with firearms), eight related to gang violence. Victims were targeted. Liquor stores and parks are popular gang hangouts. Not innocent victims; gang-on-gang violence. Retaliations. When gang graffiti starts getting crossed out, that's usually a sign there's going to be an uptick in gang violence. Public should be aware of that.

20. I happen to live near Fair Oaks and Mariposa. I had walked to the cemetery and back for exercise. Wondering if I am walking thru specific gang territory because I was clueless where active gangs were. But Calaveras / Fair Oaks seems prominent in recent trouble.

Capt. Jacobs: There have been frequent shootings around the Town & Country Liquor Store. Gang members often use the cemetery as a run-through, but you're not walking through a specific gang area. Regardless, it's best to be aware of your surroundings and not walk alone. Keep to well-lighted areas.

Paul Livingstone:

21. How could a better awareness of the struggle to transform the violence of racism, from historical abolition, civil rights the modern BLM movements in Pasadena and Altadena better prepare the members of our community? Including faith leaders, and the LA County Sheriff / Pasadena Police & beat cops... how can we envision agreement on creating more awareness of our shared history and diverse voices and stories in this area?

Paul: This is a worthy project for all of us as US citizens, to understand our history with regard to race relations and social and economic stratification. Brian has a historical presentation about racism in Pasadena, through the 20th Century. We're trying to reconcile and redeem those historical tensions. Paul's group is using art to help people to tell their own story.

Brian: As an educator, I feel Altadena-Pasadena is a microcosm of the country; we are not immune from racism and discriminatory practices. Have a presentation that has been made to a number of groups. Would be great for Altadena-Pasadena police officers to view this, especially those not born and raised in our community, to get a wider perspective on people's attitudes.