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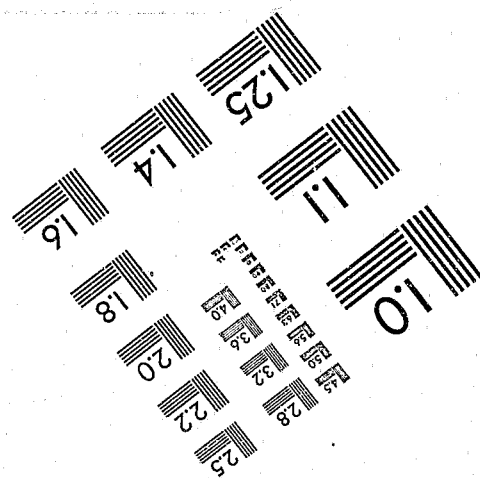
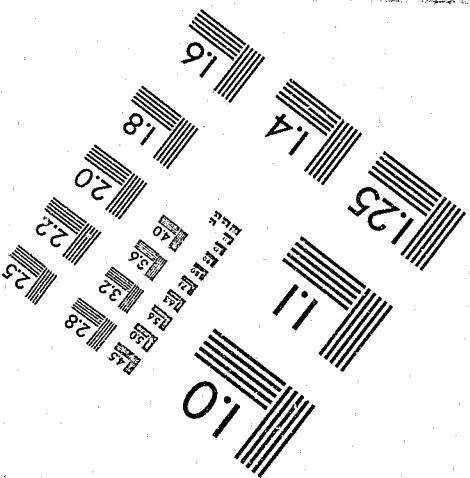
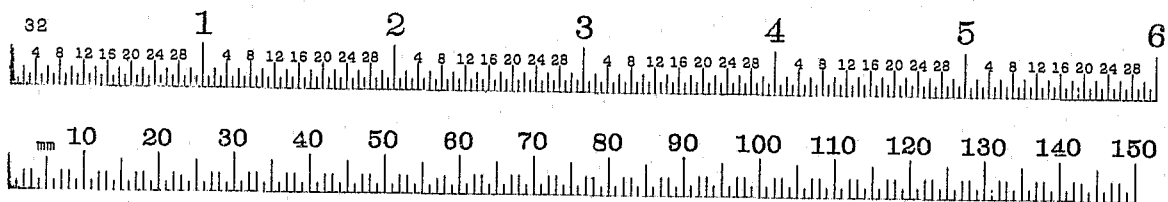
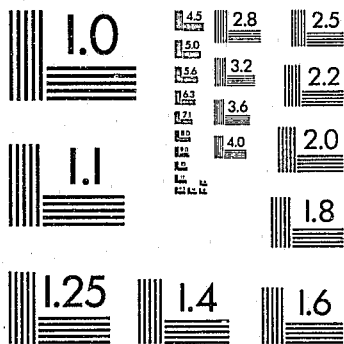
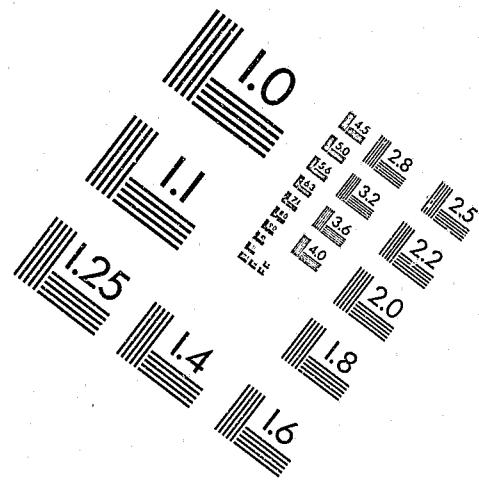
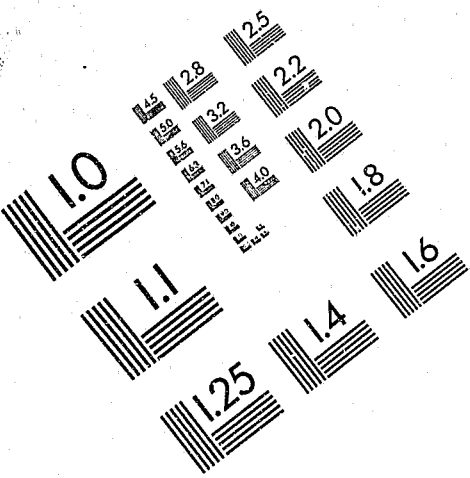
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148748

The Mesa Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program

By
TIMOTHY L. ZEHRING

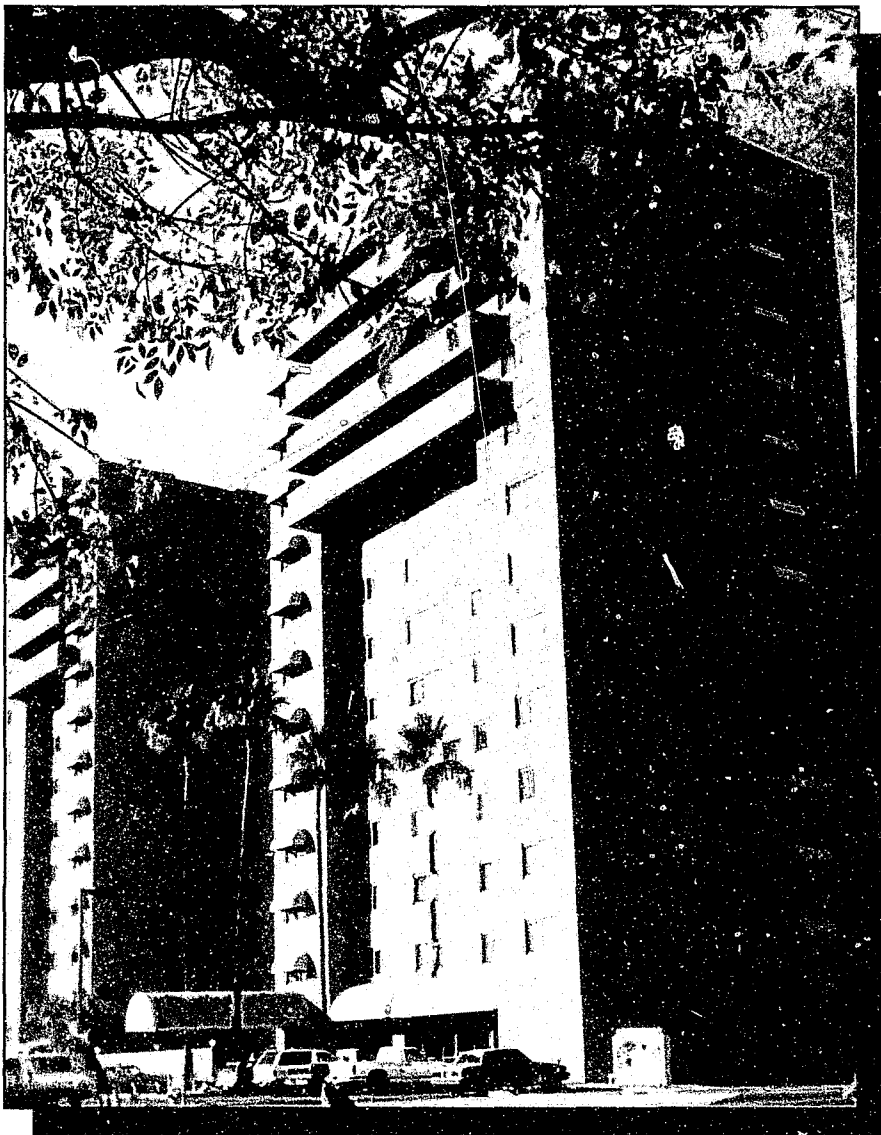
Like most cities in the Sun Belt, Mesa, Arizona, continues to experience rapid growth. Its population has nearly doubled each decade this century. Such growth and its accompanying increase in crime create great challenges for local law enforcement.

For the Mesa Police Department, spiraling crime rates in the city's numerous apartment communities presented a particularly demanding problem. To reduce this criminal activity, the police department developed the Mesa Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program.¹

The program uses a three-level approach to eliminate crime in apartment communities and to reduce calls for police service. This is accomplished through a comprehensive training program for property managers, strict security requirements for participating properties, and crime prevention training for residents. Mesa Police Department crime prevention specialists conduct each phase of the program.

LEVEL ONE—PROPERTY MANAGER TRAINING

The first level, an 8-hour training seminar for managers, covers topics pertinent to the overall operation of an apartment complex. These topics include creating, explaining, and enforcing rental



agreements, identifying illegal activity, and working with the police. Special emphasis is given to training managers on applicant screening and the eviction process.

Applicant Screening

Property managers learn to begin the screening process by discussing the Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program with applicants.

They advise potential residents that the complex cooperates with the Mesa Police Department to maintain the quality of the neighborhood. Property managers also inform applicants that they will undergo an extensive screening process, based on a list of selected criteria that they are asked to review.

The screening criteria set forth the reasons for which management cannot deny rental to applicants, based on Fair Housing laws. These laws prohibit discrimination for reasons of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicap, marital status, familial status, and others, depending on the area.

However, managers may choose not to rent to pet owners or smokers, because they are not considered "protected classes" under Fair Housing laws. Managers may also deny rental to individuals convicted in the last 5 years for manufacturing or selling drugs, or for any crime that would pose a threat to the property or interfere with other residents' peaceful enjoyment of the residences. Such offenses may include repeated disturbances, gambling, prostitution, violence, threats of violence, and rape.

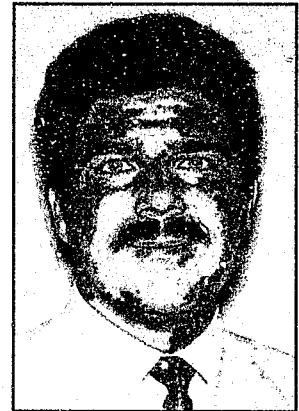
In addition, managers tell applicants that they can be denied rental privileges if a previous landlord reported such problems as damage to rental property, failure to pay rent, allowing nonresidents to move into their apartments, or failure to provide proper notice when vacating a property. Misrepresenting information on the application may also lead to rejection.

At this point, high-risk individuals often screen themselves out of consideration by opting not to

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The program uses a three-level approach to eliminate crime in apartment communities....

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Reserve Officer Zehring is a crime prevention specialist with the Mesa, Arizona, Police Department.

apply. In this way, providing information up front regarding the apartment complex's participation in the crime-free program acts as a deterrent to some potential tenants. For applicants who choose to seek residency, property managers screen them by checking references and by using local credit reporting agencies to conduct background and credit checks.

Approved applicants receive a copy of the drug-free lease addendum developed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The lease addendum represents a civil agreement between the property management and the resident. Residents agree not to engage in any type of criminal activity, including drug-related crimes and acts or threats of violence, on or near the premises.

The lease addendum also acts as a screening tool for managers. Usually, dishonest applicants will not sign such an agreement, because if they do commit any of the listed offenses, the landlord can immediately begin the eviction process,

according to local landlord and tenant laws.

The Eviction Process

Property managers know the types of eviction notices available and the process for serving them, as well as understanding the procedures of the entire eviction process. For example, while convicting an individual on a criminal charge requires proving guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt," landlords may evict residents based on a single violation and with only a preponderance of evidence. That is, if evidence exists to prove that residents "probably" violated the lease agreement, they can be evicted. This evidence may be no more than the testimony of other residents who witnessed the violation.

Although the Mesa Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program reviews the eviction process with managers, the program is governed by the philosophy that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Because the eviction process is difficult and expensive, managers

prefer to screen out potentially disruptive applicants when they apply. Property managers use every legal means available to accomplish that goal.

Level One Conclusion and Certification

An overview of the next level of the program concludes the first training session. At this time, managers learn what they must do to satisfy the requirements of the second level, which is based on a property inspection. This allows managers to progress to the next level only when they feel their property is ready, thus saving themselves and the Mesa Police Department the time and expense that more than one inspection would require.

As they will in levels two and three, managers who complete the first level of training receive a certificate proclaiming their achievement. Displaying it in the property office of the apartment complex assists in attracting honest applicants, while deterring dishonest ones.

In addition to providing written recognition of the managers' success, members of the Mesa Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit encourage managers to maintain close telephone contact with the unit. The unit also monitors progress by requiring that property managers submit monthly reports.

LEVEL TWO—CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

The second level of the program is crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), which gives property managers the knowledge they need to protect

their properties against crime. The concepts of CPTED include natural surveillance, access control, territoriality, and activity support.

To many, CPTED represents a new concept, but it has existed for many years. For example, the Anasazi Indians of the Southwest lived high above the plains on cliffs, which afforded *natural surveillance*. From the cliff tops, they could see invaders who were miles away. The ladders used to reach the plains below the Anasazis' cliff top homes provided *access control*. Removing these ladders at night made access difficult, if not impossible.

“
The concepts of CPTED include natural surveillance, access control, territoriality, and activity support.
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In addition, the city looked well cared for and protected, thereby exhibiting *territoriality*. Collectively, the Anasazis would conduct their daily chores of gathering food and cleaning, thus creating *activity support*.

Unfortunately, many modern communities are not designed as carefully as the Anasazi villages. A recent case in Mesa demonstrates the need for CPTED. A woman was brutally raped in her apartment after she opened the door to see who was knocking. This crime might have been avoided if her apartment door

had been equipped with a simple device—an eyeviewer, or “peephole.” Had there been an eyeviewer, she might not have opened the door. Or, quite possibly, the suspect would have skipped her door completely. He would have chosen another door—one without an eyeviewer—in order to catch his victim off guard.

As noted, property managers learn during the first phase of their training that the apartment complex must meet certain minimum security requirements mandated by the police department to qualify for level-two certification. These include deadbolts on all exterior doors, double locks for windows, 180-degree eyeviewers on all front doors, and shrubs trimmed below the window line. In addition, Mesa crime prevention specialists may require other measures, depending on the complex.

When property managers believe that their complex meets the requirements of the second phase, a Mesa crime prevention specialist conducts an on-site inspection of the apartment complex. Following a successful inspection, the management receives a second certificate.

LEVEL THREE—TRAINING FOR RESIDENTS

If managers wish to progress to the third and final level of the program, they must schedule crime prevention training for residents. Most managers provide incentives—such as pizza parties, barbecues, or potluck dinners—to draw residents to this event. Added incentives include musical entertainment provided by residents and door prizes donated by local businesses. In Mesa, many

local businesses willingly donate giveaways to support the crime-free effort, because they realize that the well-being of the neighborhood has a direct effect on their businesses.

Police crime prevention specialists address several topics during these meetings. First, they explain the lease addendum as it pertains to the crime-free zone. They make it clear that the addendum addresses only illegal activity committed on or near the property; managers wish to maintain a safe environment for residents, not to dictate morality or noncriminal behavior.

The specialists also discuss general safety and crime prevention techniques for specific offenses, such as automobile theft, sexual assault, and burglary. Many aspects of these meetings parallel a neighborhood watch presentation, and in effect, train tenants to be the eyes and ears of the apartment community.

After completing this level, the manager receives the third certificate. This certificate, along with the others, sends a message to all applicants—honest and high-risk—that residents look for and report criminal activity.

In addition, properties that complete all three levels of the program may purchase a striking, four-color sign imprinted with the Mesa Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program logo to post on their property. While they have earned this privilege, it is just that—a privilege. Managers must sign an agreement with the police department that they will abide by all program guidelines or lose permission to post the sign. Complexes qualify for the mandatory yearly renewal by holding at

least one crime prevention meeting, in conjunction with the Mesa Police Department, during the year. Many managers conduct these meetings quarterly or even monthly.

Property managers may also use the Mesa Police Department program logo in all of their advertising, including the telephone directory, apartment guides, and



newspaper ads. This alerts potential applicants of the partnership between the police department and the apartment community. It also attracts honest renters, who want to live in a "crime-free" environment. In that regard, managers sign an agreement not to advertise that the property is, in fact, crime-free, only that they have joined Mesa's crime-free program. This removes the

appearance of false advertising should illegal activity occur on the premises.

OTHER TRAINING

The Mesa Fire Department also provides optional training for apartment managers, which is separate from the police department's program. An hour-long session informs managers about general safety and fire safety in apartment communities.

The training covers such topics as exiting systems, fire alarm systems, safety committees, pool safety, chemical storage, property inspections, and cooperating with the fire department. The department also provides an information booklet for residents and on-site inspections when requested by management.

BENEFICIARIES OF THE PROGRAM

Property Managers

Managers who join the Mesa Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program may lose tenants to the screening and eviction process. Why then, would managers want to join the program?

Quite simply, most managers want to rent to nondisruptive tenants. Further, renting to criminals can lead to dramatic declines in property values, severe property damage, drug raids, toxic contamination from drug labs, loss of rent during evictions and repairs, and animosity between residents and managers.

In contrast, participating managers reap numerous benefits from this program. The benefits to

managers include more stable and satisfied residents, increased demand for rental units, lower maintenance and repair costs, higher property values, and peace of mind from spending more time on routine management and less time on crisis control.

For example, one apartment complex had only 60-percent occupancy and was so crime-ridden that police never entered the community without backup. After joining the crime-free program, the complex increased its occupancy to 100 percent, with a waiting list. And, the police department now receives few, if any, calls for service.

Liability and forfeiture are other reasons that managers participate in the program. If property managers rent to dangerous criminals but ignore their violent behavior, managers could be found liable if innocent residents are injured or killed. Further, if property managers knowingly rent to drug criminals, they risk seizure of their property by law enforcement. By participating in the program, then, managers have a defense against law suits and legal forfeiture.

Finally, participating managers also benefit from the favorable publicity generated by the program. The Mesa Chamber of Commerce publishes a list of participating members, which is available to prospective tenants upon request. Complexes with one certificate receive a three-star rating; two certificates, a four-star rating; and all three certificates, a five-star rating. This feature has induced many property managers to join the program.

The Department

Since the program's inception in January 1993, the Mesa Police Department has trained over 600 managers. There has been a groundswell of support from managers and residents alike. Officers are also receiving more cooperation in their dealings with property managers.

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**Apartment managers
and residents...are
learning that they
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crime.**
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In addition, because managers better understand the difference between civil and criminal matters following the first phase of the program, the department has experienced a substantial decrease in calls of a civil nature. In fact, overall, the department receives fewer calls for service from complexes that have completed the program.

The Community

The Mesa Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program reaches more than the apartment communities; it benefits the entire Mesa area. Many burglars and other criminals work within close proximity of their residences, but their activities can spread into neighboring communities as well. As a result, removing

offenders from a particular area usually evokes a decrease in crime in the entire area, affecting as much as a square mile. Armed robberies, auto thefts, and criminal damage are just a few of the crimes that may decrease. This improves the overall health and appearance of the entire community and may increase property values as well.

Further, because of the higher incidence of crime and graffiti in inner cities nationwide, many people spend their money at regional shopping centers and malls outside of once-flourishing downtown districts. Inner-city businesses certainly benefit from cleaner and safer neighborhoods as they set up crime-free and drug-free zones.

CONCLUSION

While one individual or law enforcement officer may not be able to prevent crime single-handedly in an entire State or city, crime can be curtailed in targeted areas when residents accept responsibility for their own environment. The Mesa Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program demonstrates that even renters can feel “pride of ownership” toward their communities.

Apartment managers and residents, working in cooperation with law enforcement, are learning that they can help to control crime. They can live in a crime-free zone, and together, they can make a difference. ♦

Endnote

Mesa's Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program was adapted from a program originally developed by John Campbell, a private consultant in Portland, Oregon.