



PARTNERS IN CRIME PREVENTION

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

SOCIAL MEDIA – THE NEW WAY TO CONDUCT NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH 1

SOCIAL MEDIA – THE GOOD 2

SOCIAL MEDIA – WHERE YOU CAN FIND THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE 2

SOCIAL MEDIA – THE BAD 3

CONTACTING THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE – SOCIAL MEDIA SHOULD NOT BE THE PRIMARY WAY 3

SOCIAL MEDIA – A NEW TOOL 4

SOCIAL MEDIA— THE NEW WAY TO CONDUCT NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Social media has revolutionized the way we communicate with our family, our friends and our neighbors. It also has revolutionized the way we communicate within Neighborhood Watches, and how local police agencies can communicate with the public, at least for those agencies that have tried to use social media.

The speed it takes to communicate in this 21st century is almost trite. We are all now used to instant information whether it be the news from the other side of the world, pictures from our relatives on the other side of the country, or gossip from our neighbors.

25 years ago, communicating with your neighbor took time, compared to the instant communications of email today. Before email and social media it could take time to organize a community into a neighborhood watch.

The concept of neighborhood watch has been around since the late 1960's. The idea is to encourage neighbors to talk to each other about crime in their communities, to be aware of what is going on around them. It also encourages residents to talk to police, especially to report crimes and suspicious activity.

But the tools for that communication has been rudimentary compared to the way we

communicate today. Telephone trees were the fastest method to notify residents of pressing crimes like a series of burglaries or of suspicious activity to watch out for. But the telephone is time consuming even if you have a short list. And if someone isn't home (answering machines were introduced in the late 1970's) they did not get the message at all. Meetings were important in meeting neighbors and representatives of local law enforcement agencies. But, everyone may not be able to attend. Sometimes, neighborhood watches would publish newsletters, but that method is time consuming, expensive, and may not be as timely as needed.

With the advent of the internet, email, and now social media, distribution of information is less cumbersome and cheap. The emphasis now can be less on setting up a communications network and more on the message itself.

For those who are into something new, social media has been a new, beneficial way to communicate. For others, social media is something to be wary of.

Social media does have a benefit for spreading information quickly to many people. But, there are problems with social media if users do not consider common sense and common courtesies.



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SOCIAL MEDIA— WHERE YOU CAN FIND THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The Sheriff's Office maintains the following accounts:

- <https://www.facebook.com/SnoCoSheriff/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/SnoCoSheriffK9/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/GraniteFallsPoliceDepartment/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/StanwoodPoliceDepartment/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/SnohomishPoliceDepartment-266332583559010/>
- <https://twitter.com/SnoCoSheriff>
- <https://nextdoor.com/feed/644076/?i=hjbqzvgffdnsdaauvqh>

SOCIAL MEDIA— THE GOOD

Advocates of social media only see the benefits of being in touch with family and their community. Social media is flexible and portable. We are not limited to one type of hardware to send and receive information on social media. And social media services are developing with Facebook and Twitter becoming the oldsters and Instagram, Snap Chat, and Periscope being the up and coming application. You can use any social media service on your PC, laptop, tablet or smart phone so that you can truly have "information at your fingertips."

And with the public focusing on various social media services, organizations have been exploring ways to send their messages through social media to their audiences. This includes government agencies such as the Sheriff's Office. As Shari Ireton, the Director of Communications for the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office, has pointed out, "...in the 21st century police have to go where our community 'is' - and in this case, we know that a lot of them are on social media."

She also has pointed out that publishing on social media can be a lot of work, especially for an agency that has multiple accounts, like the Sheriff's Office. But social media allows the Sheriff's Office to keep the public informed of dangers of criminal activity, pending weather events such as

strong wind storms or major snow storms, or updates during major natural disasters such as the Oso landslide. In Shari Ireton's view, "By connecting with them using these tools we, by default, create ambassadors for our agency across the county."

The Sheriff's Office has seen the benefits of this new approach to inform the public:

- One day, it posted pictures of stolen items on Instagram, linking those pictures via Twitter and Facebook, to a wide audience. By the end of the day, detectives returned stolen items to two victims, and stolen items to more victims on subsequent days.
- It sends alerts to specific neighborhoods via Nextdoor about issues such as missing persons, road closures, etc.
- During the last two storms, it has notified over 5,000 active accounts about hyper-local, timely information about road closures, river levels, and community resources through Twitter.
- In response to a blog article on My Everett News, (<http://myeverettnews.com>) an anonymous post helped detectives in a homicide investigation.

SOCIAL MEDIA– THE BAD

While many people see the positive of using social media, there can be problems that arise if people are not careful in what they post online. Some examples include:

Social Media can hinder operations. Social media can be a hindrance to Sheriff’s Office operations if someone posts information that could harm an investigation. Specific details of an ongoing police operation such as a SWAT team deployment or a manhunt, can tip off suspects or bring unnecessary spectators to the scene.

Deputies are concerned about their own safety, the safety of the public, and the effectiveness of their investigations. They are also required to protect the privacy of individuals except in specific circumstances. So naming names, or giving too much in specifics about ongoing operations can interfere with the Sheriff’s Office.

911 does not receive information about crimes/suspicious activity. Some people post information about suspicious activity or crimes on social media, but do not report them to 911. While posting this information helps with awareness for the people who belong to a specific social media group, the activity or crime should be reported to the Sheriff’s Office through 911 first. This is the channel through which the Sheriff’s Office receives its initial information of a crime. Calling 911 puts your report on record. It is also the most timely method of telling the Sheriff’s Office of a crime in progress, The Sheriff’s Office does not monitor its social media accounts 24

hours a day. 911 is a 24/7 service.

Deputies frequently complain of citizens who do not use 911 to report crimes and suspicious activity. People call the precinct, or deputies’ cell phones to report when they should call 911. And now people post to social media thinking that someone in the Sheriff’s Office will see it. Someone might see it, but too late to take effective action.

Rumors can give an incomplete or wrong picture of the situation. People frequently speculate on or draw conclusions from scant or even wrong information which can spread quickly over social media. Deputies are often slow and guarded about releasing information. Their concern will always be to protect investigations and the privacy of participants.

An example occurred in the Woodinville area last summer. On local Facebook groups there was talk of “500” 911 calls during a two day period and a discussion of what was perceived as an increase in burglaries in the area. In response, the Woodinville police chief posted on the Woodinville PD’s Facebook page publish the statistics of the number of calls in the area (the total turned out to be 41) and gave some perspective on the true crime situation.

CONTACTING THE SHERIFF’S OFFICE–SOCIAL MEDIA SHOULD NOT BE THE PRIMARY WAY

If you have information that you want to tell the Sheriff’s Office use one of the following direct methods:

- *Call 911 for crimes in progress, suspicious activity, or to report a crime when you discover it. Telling the call taker that you want contact with a deputy*
- *Call the Tip Line, (425) 388-3845, if you have information about a person of interest in a crime/case being investigated by the Sheriff’s Office, and it is not an emergency.*
- *Or file a report online at*

<http://www.snohomishcounty.wa.gov/FormCenter/Sheriff-4/Anonymous-Tips-107>

SOCIAL MEDIA- A NEW TOOL

Social media adds another means to communicate for families, neighbors and government. But it is only one more communications tool. We still have face to face, meetings, phone, email, and letters available to us. And each has its own benefits and limitations.

Social media's benefits include the ability to reach a wide audience quickly. This is a definite benefit for county government especially in emergencies, such as the Oso landslide, when it is important to broadcast information quickly.

In this 21st century with PC's, tablets, and smartphones, social media is portable, so that people can receive information anywhere they are.

Social media also can connect people who normally might not be talking to each other. One perceived problem that Neighborhood Watch tries to overcome is neighbors not meeting neighbors. While it is still important for neighbors to meet face to face, social media can help neighbors communicate wherever they are and whenever they can.

But social media is only one form of communications. While it may be ben-

eficial to let Facebook neighbors know about car prowls in the area, it is still important to call 911 to receive any response from the Sheriff's Office. Even though our two 911 agencies, SNOPAC and SNOCOM, have implemented texting to take reports of crime, they still prefer a phone call because of the advantages it gives to call takers in determining the situation.

Developing a dialog between the Sheriff's Office and the public can be accomplished through social media, but the other traditional means of communication need to be implemented to have a more effective accomplishment toward the goal of making our community safer.

Rumors and misinformation can divide citizens from government. The noise from social media requires all of us to be discriminating on what we might view as credible. But social media can be a tool to make all of us aware of crime, educate the public on the methods to deter crime, and serve as an implement for the public and the Sheriff's Office to join together to fight crime in our neighborhoods.

OFFICE OF NEIGHBORHOODS

MAKING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS SAFER

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SHERIFF'S OFFICE CRIME PREVENTION WEB PAGE:

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NEWSLETTER INFO

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If you have questions regarding this newsletter or any articles that appear in it, please contact the editor at neighborhoodwatch@snoco.org

TIP LINES



Snohomish County Sheriff's Office: 425-388-3845

Online Tips: <http://snohomishcountywa.gov/303/Anonymous-Tips>

Crime Stoppers of Puget Sound: 1-800-222-8477