



story by Barb Hornby
photos by Chris Bishop

STANDING ROOM ONLY IN BLANCHARD

By Barb Hornby

It was “standing room only” at the Crime Stoppers Meeting held at the Blanchard Community Center on April 1st. The turn-out showed a genuine concern for the increase of burglaries in Blanchard and surrounding communities toward Newport, Spirit Lake and Vay. Sarah Kramer, a crimes victim advocate opened the meeting by talking about the Crime Victim Service Center located in Newport that is open to persons living in Blanchard. Trained volunteers and staff are on-call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to assist victims of crime. Services such as crisis counseling, support groups, professional therapy, medical and legal advocacy are supported by a grant, and therefore, are offered at no cost. For more information call (509) 447-2274 or 1-866-373-6627.

Bonner County Sheriff Deputy James Cotter and Deputy Michael Miracle discussed ways to protect yourself and property against crime. They also talked about the recent burglaries in the Blanchard area. There is an on-going investigation and they do have suspects but declined to discuss details of the cases for obvious reasons. There are discrepancies in the number of burglaries as reported by the deputies, the sheriff’s department and the count that Blanchard compiled. All of the burglaries may not have been reported so they would not be in the Sheriff’s computer data base. *(A list of occurrences was given to the deputies after the meeting that indicated a higher number than was talked about during the meeting. Three days after the meeting another burglary took place in the Blanchard area)*

The following points were made and answers/suggestions given during discussion with the audience:

- There are 20 deputies and 4 sergeants to cover 19,000 square miles in Bonner County which spreads their resources thin. Despite this, the audience complimented the officers for generally having good response time and making their presence known in Blanchard.
- There is a distinction between burglary and robbery. Burglary is sneaking into your house or property and taking something. Robbery is taking something from you through confrontation and use of a weapon.
- Report all crimes by calling the sheriff’s office or 9-1-1 so that law enforcement can follow-up. This will also help in reflecting an accurate number count of crime occurrences. Be sure to get a case number and a copy of the resulting police report. Sign the complaint. If you can not get anyone at the Sheriff’s office call the dispatcher’s number at 208 265-5525.

- Be aware of your daily surroundings. Report suspicious activities, persons and vehicles that are not familiar to your neighborhood. Get license plate numbers and descriptions. Carry a pad of paper and a pencil with you. Hearsay and rumor should also be reported because word-of-mouth often helps in catching criminals.
 - In the state of Idaho you DO NOT have a right to shoot someone who is stealing your things. You DO have a right to protect yourself if they pose a bodily threat or if you feel your life is in danger. A claim of threat can be challenged in court so be mindful of what a jury would consider reasonable.
 - Guns can legally be carried in the state of Idaho without a permit only if they are not concealed.
 - Tasers do not require a permit but a person needs to have training in how to use such a device.
 - Protect yourself with pepper spray but know how to use it. Wasp spray is not recommended because it is poisonous.
 - A person must take into consideration the risk to self (bodily injury or lawsuit) in trying to detain, fight, harm, or catch an intruder. Let law enforcement do their job. Don't try to be a hero or take the law into your own hands.
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- Post "no trespassing" signs as a warning. Spraying orange paint on fence posts every 650 feet is the same as posting "no trespassing" and/or "no hunting" signs.
 - If you leave your keys in a car and someone steals it and has an accident the car owner is not liable (but it is not a good idea to leave your keys in the car or leave it unlocked).
 - If you go to an event or a meeting that is well publicized (such as a funeral or a crime stopper's meeting) leave someone at home and be sure to lock your doors and windows whether you are home or away.
 - Use surveillance cameras
 - Have someone watch your house if you are going to be on vacation. The sheriff's office can help with vacation checks but be sure they know who will be taking care of your house especially if they will be coming and going. Don't tell everyone that you will be gone for an extended period.
 - Don't have a regular schedule or pattern that a criminal can figure out.
 - Use light timers that come on and off at different/varying times
 - Get a watch dog (or better yet, two).
 - Permanently mark and/or register valuable property or keep in a safety deposit box.
 - Safes can be stolen if not permanently bolted in place. Keep serial numbers somewhere other than in a safe in case it is stolen.
 - Inventory and photograph your valuables. Engrave/mark them with your license number.
 - Make calls to 9-1-1 on a landline phone so that your address can be automatically traced back to you (since cell phones don't work in Blanchard this should be a given anyway).

- Consider getting an alarm system. Jack Williams of Newport Alarm attended the meeting. He specializes in security systems, medical alert systems and central station monitoring. If interested call 509-447-4903 or 1-800-938-4184
- Start, or participate in, a Neighborhood Watch Program. It is a network of neighbors trained by crime prevention officers in home and self-protection, suspect identification and how to effectively serve as additional eyes and ears for law enforcement agencies. It is important to have a main contact person. For the Happy Valley/Deer Trail Neighborhood Watch Program call Mary Powell at 208-437-2596. Ron Goodbrake is also starting a Crime Stopper reporting program for the Blanchard area. Ron has set up a phone number/answering machine to help with the reporting of suspicious activities. Call 208-546-5509 and Ron will get back with you. There was also discussion of having a Neighborhood Watch Program at StoneRidge. For more information about the StoneRidge area call:208 437-0438

Blanchard wishes to thank the Bonner County Sheriff's Department for taking the time to answer questions and listen to concerns. We also thank the record number of people who showed their interest by attending the meeting. We look forward to working together in order to keep our communities safe and free of crime.