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Big Turn Out for First “Take Back Antioch” Meeting



An estimated 150 people attended the first meeting of Take Back Antioch.

Get Involved, Make a Difference, Call the Police Residents Urged

By Allen Payton, Publisher

A standing-room only crowd of about 150 concerned residents and business owners attended the first “Quality of Community” meeting organized by the new group, Take Back Antioch, on Friday night, February 4 to hear what they can do to help stop the crime problems in our community.



Take Back Antioch Founder
Brittney Gougeon.

The group’s founder, 23-year-old Brittney Gougeon, was joined by Mayor Jim Davis and Acting Police Chief Allan Cantando in welcoming those who attended.

“It brings tears to my eyes to see so many people come out, tonight,” Davis said. “I’m sure you can find

something else to do on a Friday night."

What was stressed continuously throughout the meeting was for residents to call the police when they suspect a crime is occurring or something looks suspicious.



Mayor Davis welcomes those in attendance at the Take Back Antioch meeting, as Acting Chief Allan Cantando awaits his turn to speak.

Gougeon outlined existing ways in which residents can get involved, including VIPS – Volunteers In Police Service, G.A.P. – Graffiti Abatement Program, Neighborhood Watch and the community clean-ups.

Dennis Jeglum of the Antioch Police Crime Prevention Commission provided information on starting a Neighborhood Watch program and encouraged citizens to call the police and report suspicious activities.

"You are the eyes and ears for our police department," he said. "Will they come every time you call? Absolutely. But right away? Not necessarily. It depends on if the crime is in progress. They'll respond to that first."

If it's not an emergency, he encouraged residents to call the police department's Non-Emergency number, 778-2441. It was later suggested that everyone put the number on speed dial in their cell phones.

Jeglum, a retired police officer, then defined what an emergency is. "Life threatening or a crime in progress," he said.

Then he shared why sometimes a crime or suspicious activity doesn't get reported. "People will say 'I didn't call because I thought he was gonna call' or 'I didn't think it was important,'" Jeglum said.

"We have about one percent of our community who doesn't want to be a part of it," he added.

Jeglum then gave one simple way to improve neighborhood safety. "Make it easier for the police to see your address. Turn your porch light on when the sun goes down and off when the sun comes up. It costs you less than a latte a month."

For those interested in starting a Neighborhood Watch, they were told to call 779-6980 and leave a message. "[Commissioner] Hans Ho will call you back," Jeglum added.

He also encouraged everyone to attend a commission meeting, usually held the third Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at the police department's Community Room. However, the next one will be held Wednesday, February 23.

Cantando said he wants volunteers, "as we have a diminished budget."

"This is the largest turnout I've ever seen. It makes my heart warm," he added.

He spoke of the need to reduce "Part 1 Crimes" in our city. "We had a spike in homicides [last year]. But violent crimes were down. What were up were burglaries. (They were up almost 32% according to the city's website, see <http://www.ci.antioch.ca.us/CityGov/Police/crime-maps/crime-maps.htm>)

"People think they're bothering us by calling in or they're embarrassed if what they observed doesn't turn out to be a crime," Cantando shared. "We would rather you call in and let us prioritize them. We want you to call us."

Gougeon then shared some details on the city's G.A.P. to clean up or paint over graffiti in Antioch.

Residents were encouraged to call the city's Public Works Department at 779-6950 to report graffiti and

within 24 to 48 hours the G.A.P. team will remove or paint over it. She also asked for volunteers to give two to 10 hours per week to help.

Photos from the group's website were shown of recent graffiti, some of which had already been cleaned up, including a 300-foot long section of fence on Empire Mine Road, near Golf Course Road, that had been spray painted.

She shared a bit about the VIPS program, which assists the police department in handling abandoned auto abatement, handicapped parking enforcement, illegal sign abatement and traffic control. Volunteers are asked to give four hours a week to the program.

Then Gougeon shared a few new ideas, including establishing volunteers to bring back Code Enforcement and to combat blight, and to have a "Community Watch" mentality. She cited the fact that the city of Garden Grove, California has a volunteer code enforcement team. Currently Antioch has no staff in Code Enforcement/Neighborhood Improvement Services.

If residents see things dumped they were urged to call the city's garbage collection company, Allied Waste at 1-800-NO-DUMPING (663-8674).

And if residents smell something suspicious, they're encouraged to call Air Quality Control at 1-800-334-6367.

She announced that the necessary funds to pay to formalize the group as a 501c3 non-profit organization, had been raised in a matter of two weeks. Gougeon shared the reasons why: "It formalizes our goals, establishes formal structure, allows for securing grants and accepting tax deductible donations."

She encouraged everyone to attend the next City Council meeting, Tuesday, February 15 at 7 p.m. at City Hall.



Gougeon introduces the other Take Back Antioch leaders.

She then introduced the group of residents who helped get the organization started. Four of them then formed a panel for a question and answer time, which proved to be lively and caused some debate among those in attendance.

The primary matters of discussion were forming Neighborhood Watch programs and G.A.P.

Suggestions offered were: invite your neighbors to your home for a meeting, including those who are problem neighbors; have your meeting in your driveway; come out of your homes and walk your neighborhood; place a "Pay or Put" situation on a home owner with problem tenants; personally give your flyers announcing the meeting, to you neighbors; meet your neighbors, especially new ones moving in. Say "Hi, my name is... We have a Neighborhood Watch. Would you like to join us?"; wave to your (problem) neighbors, kill them with kindness, make them feel uncomfortable, was another suggestion; participate in National Night Out in August.

Some individuals offered one woman, who was afraid, help distributing flyers to form a Neighborhood Watch. "We'll walk door-to-door with you," one said.

When the panel was asked by another attendee "what are your long term goals," Gougeon responded, "creating the kind of community we all want to live in."

When asked "what are the consequences of tagging, are there talks in schools?" Cantando responded that he wants to get some ordinances passed by the city council to help address graffiti.

One woman, a local hair salon owner, said to a round of applause, "Make the kids and hold their parents

accountable and make them paint over the graffiti."

"Get a van, pile them up on Saturday and Sunday. They're not going to church, anyway," she added to laughter from the audience.

Gougeon also shared "we're considering funding other things" with funds raised by the new non-profit.

She mentioned the police cars with eight-to-nine year old equipment. "Our police cars don't have Google Earth to track our cars," she stated. "It costs \$10,000 per car."

She also mentioned a security camera system that covers a wall and provides deterrence in areas where there is heavy graffiti.

Bari Costello shared what she and her neighbors have been doing through the Rivertown Preservation Society, in cleaning up painting the graffiti in the city's historical downtown area. She invited people to attend their meetings the first Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Woman's Club, 509 G Street, Antioch.

A video tape of the meeting was made by Bob Butler and will soon be available on the group's website at www.TakeBackAntioch.com. For more information or to get involved, visit their website, click on their ad on the left side of this page or email info@takebackantioch.com.

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Take Back Antioch Leaders



Stand room only attendance



Mayor Davis speaks



Leader Brittney Gougeon

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