

Police, community celebrate National Night Out

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Jefferson City police and community members gathered in streets and neighborhoods Tuesday as part of a national campaign designed to make communities safer.



Due to various reasons, JCPD hadn't held the gatherings for some time. But after Tuesday's event, officials said they would be getting out and participating in more Neighborhood Watch Group meetings.

On Tuesday night, officers went to two events as part of the National Night Out Against Crime. One was with the East Miller Neighborhood Watch group on Nelson Drive; the other was sponsored by First Presbyterian Church on Madison Street.

National Night Out events see neighbors meet with officers, talk with residents about crime trends and give statistics for the neighborhoods and ideas for how to prevent crime.

The First Presbyterian event Tuesday included a live performance, and food and drinks for residents to enjoy.

"To see that we can bring these events to Jefferson City after seeing the positive outcomes it brings to other towns is amazing. I've seen what this can be, and I'm glad we could carry it out," said Angela Madden, pastor of First Presbyterian Church.

Many of those attending were excited to be involved with such a positive community event.

"Being able to get people out into a safe atmosphere and seeing the neighborhood enjoy this is such a joy," said Jan Haviland at the church.

"I think it's great that the people of the church can connect with the people of the community and come out and fellowship," said Kelvin Beza, a member of the community.

After the tornado and flooding in 2019, the COVID pandemic that followed, plus a lack of manpower, JCPD had to cut back on doing the events.

"Now that the community has opened up, we want to be out doing more of these type of events," said JCPD spokesman Lt. David Williams. "It's all about increasing communication between officers and the community, and these are the types of events we want to be at."

The watch groups are part of the police department's community policing efforts — getting out of patrol cars and connecting with people on a personal level to understand their needs.

Williams said much of their focus is on property crimes such as thefts and burglaries. Over the last couple of years, he said, one of the big problems they have been dealing with is people leaving cars unlocked and returning to find items stolen.

“It’s a very easily preventable crime,” Williams said. “That probably makes up half of the property crime we get called on. If you lock your doors, criminals will generally not break into a vehicle. They’ll go up and down a street in the middle of the night, and they’ll check which vehicles are unlocked. And if they are unlocked, they’ll get in and see if you’ve got anything valuable.”

Many times, preventing these crimes doesn’t cost much at all, authorities said. These include trimming trees or bushes in the front of houses so neighbors as well as passing police officers can see the house and to eliminate easy spots for people to hide.

For more information about forming a watch group, contact JCPD at 634-6400.