



zone 3 newsletter spring 2010

ZONE 3 BORDERS:

Harlem, Chicago, Austin, and North Blvd.

ZONE 3 MEETINGS

The 4th Wednesday of every month at 7:00pm in the Main Oak Park Public Library.

MCGRUFF HOMES

McGruff Houses provide safe locations in neighborhoods where children can seek nearby assistance if they feel threatened or scared. Please consider making your home a McGruff House. For more information, please contact Officer Murphy, and attend your regular monthly zone meeting.

Resident Beat Officer Raphael Murphy / 708.305.9779 / rmurphy@oak-park.us

Graffiti in Oak Park

I don't think I'll be surprising anyone when I say that there is a lot of graffiti in our town. Graffiti is a tricky issue for the Police, and I'd like to take this opportunity to go into in some detail in the hopes of engendering a better understanding by the public. I think it may help in mitigating the problem.

Graffiti is any unauthorized inscription, word, figure, painting or other defacement that is written, marked, etched, scratched, sprayed, drawn, painted, or engraved on or otherwise affixed to any surface of public or private property. If it is done with permission, it isn't graffiti.

First of all, let me make one thing very clear. There is a significant difference between gang graffiti and other types. Gang graffiti is about gaining recognition for the gang, and typically gang identifiers are the focal point of the work. It can be territorial, but it can have other meanings as well, and its presence does not always indicate the establishment of a gang in

a particular area. It's also not typically "artistic", often done in a single color, with rudimentary images.

That being said, the type of graffiti we experience here in Oak Park is **overwhelmingly NOT gang graffiti**. The spray painted bubble letters on building walls, freeway embankments, and train cars, indecipherable marker scrawls on mailboxes and signposts, messy etchings on business windows, scratches on bus stop plexiglass – we call it "tagging". Tagging is a stylized public art form. It is not gang related, and has no violent motives. I'd be lying if I said I understood well the culture behind it, but it is said to be an element of hip-hop subculture and skateboarder subculture. That probably just barely scratches the surface. Graffiti exists in music culture, video games, sports, skateboarding, and even the legitimate art world. There are internationally known graffiti artists who have gallery showings, do commissioned work, and

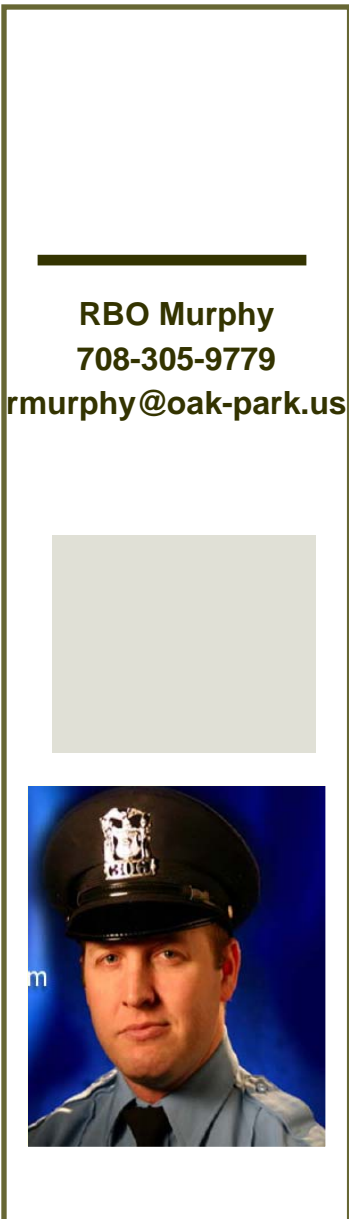
release books of their illegally placed work. My point is, "tagging" skirts the edge of legitimacy, existing in a conceptual area that is very attractive to a lot of creative, rebellious types, like say, teenagers and young adults. They are typically not violent criminals. Some consider themselves artists, although I believe a lot of the behavior is driven by thrill seeking, anti-social attitudes, and peer recognition. I think a lot of the perpetrators see their activity as more mischievous than criminal, and don't really recognize the social or economic cost of the damage they do. Many if not most of our offenders are from Oak Park and neighboring towns.

Graffiti is illegal, both by state law and by local ordinance. Oak Park's graffiti ordinances, which prohibit not just graffiti, but the possession of graffiti implements by juveniles in some public places, allow for fines starting at \$250.00, and up to \$1000.00 per instance for multiple violations. Parents and guardians are liable for those fines.

Oak Park Police
123 Madison, Oak
Park

PHONE:
708.358.3800

**For Emergencies
Dial
911**



Graffiti continued:

If you are a parent, the police department would appreciate it if you could speak to your kids about graffiti. Especially if you notice that they're carrying around markers or spray paint, or writing graffiti style tags on their notebooks, backpacks, skateboards, etc. Make it clear that graffiti does real damage, and costs people real money to clean up. Make it clear there are real consequences if they're caught.

This department has discussed a variety of measures to help mitigate graffiti problems. Arrests alone have not proven to

curb tagging significantly, at least not for very long. One of the most effective ways of stopping graffiti is to make removal a priority. Quick removal of the tags limits its exposure, reducing the reward to the tagger, and limiting its ability to inspire more graffiti. If you discover graffiti on your property, please remove it as quickly as possible. The Cook County Sheriff's Department has a free graffiti removal program that is available to the public. They can be contacted at 773-869-4710. This program has proven to be effective and prompt.

I invite any other ideas that might help deal with this nuisance. Feel free to contact me directly. We've toyed with the idea of "free walls", and other methods of co-opting the drive to make public artwork into a legitimate format. Of course, any legitimization contradicts the ideals and fun of dressing up in hoodies, tying a bandana across your face like some kind of urban bandit, and sneaking around at three in the morning.

Finally, if you see tagging in progress, do not wait. Call 911 immediately.

Bicycles on Lake Street

Once again, as the weather improves, I seem to be giving a fair number of lectures on the dos and don'ts of bicycling to random adults and a hefty number of kids that I see riding along Lake Street. And I do mean lecture. Quick warnings and brief explanations seldom result in anything more than irritated or confused looks, and I'll admit that the rules of cycling in a busy business area may seem convoluted.

The rules are actually pretty straightforward, and they aren't new, although I swear I get the same uncomprehending stares from some of the same people every year.

It works like this:

No one, regardless of age, can ride their bicycle on the sidewalk in a business

district (or skateboard, rollerskate, etc.) That's nobody. No kids, no adults, no families. Why? Because sidewalks are for pedestrians, and it just isn't safe to mix both when there is too little room to begin with among walkers, planters, sidewalk tables and chairs, newspaper boxes, people entering and exiting shops, and the like. People get run into, cyclists crash. Not to mention the common practice of cyclists to hop on and off sidewalks as the mood suits them, increasing the likelihood of an accident.

So remember. In the business district (stores and businesses, not houses) nobody can ride on the sidewalk.

Where can you ride? On the street. Anybody can

ride on the street, but, and this is the kicker, *you must follow the rules of the road!* That means ride on the right, with traffic, travelling in the correct lanes, obeying signs and signals. Cyclists seem to think that a bicycle is a golden pass to freedom, absolving them of the responsibility to act safely or rationally. This is a near universal condition, observable in cyclists of all ages and styles. Traffic laws apply to bicycles.

People say to me, "I don't feel safe riding in the road on Lake Street, and I can't ride on the sidewalk. What am I supposed to do?" The answer is simple. Walk. Ride to Lake, lock up the bike, and walk. It's just as healthy, just as ecologically conscientious. Questions? Call or e-mail me.