

New crime-free housing available at Hidden Oaks Village

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Hidden Oaks Village, a southwestern-style housing development located on south El Camino Real, took the final step toward having a crime-free environment on Sunday, April 29 when it completed the three-step Atascadero Crime Free Multi-Housing Program. The program is the only one of its kind on the Central Coast and is designed to filter criminals out of housing communities.

"The main purpose of this program is to stop or eliminate the instances of crime," said Atascadero Police Sgt. Joe Allen. "There tends to be a lot of crime in multi-family housing communities. You have more people in a smaller area. With this program, we can see up to a 100 percent decrease in crime activity."

The program first began in

Atascadero three years ago with the 64 units of Mira Vista Apartments. Information provided by the Atascadero Police Department said in 2004 a total of 152 calls for police service were taken. By 2006, the number had been reduced to 12, representing a 92 percent decrease in the total number of needed police presence. There were 44 crime reports taken in 2004, while only one was taken in 2006. There were 11 drug or alcohol related arrests in 2004, but there were no arrests made in 2006. Allen said that the use of the program has made proactive strides toward establishing crime-free housing communities.

"We have over 10,000 people in housing communities who are already signed up in some form of the program," Allen said. "We probably have between 12,000 and 15,000 people who live in housing communities in Atascadero."

The program is initiated in three steps. The first step is made when a community owner or manager takes an

eight-hour class about the Crime Free Multi-Housing Program. To date, there are 17 housing communities enrolled in some level of the program.

The second step is a property inspection, which helps with crime prevention through environmental design. Key elements of this step are providing adequate lighting, secondary locks on all doors, fixed windows and upkeep on trees and bushes. The step is based on a 100-point inspection that may require repairs on the part of management.

"This is a very cooperative program," Allen said. "We can suggest improvements that need to be made and we can come back and re-inspect once they are met."

The third step is providing the residents of the community with a "Safety Social" that introduces them to the program and gives them a chance to get to know their neighbors as well as the APD and Atascadero City Fire Department.

The key element of the program is a required background check for all residents living within the housing community. If a resident commits a crime

involving violence, drugs or alcohol or crimes against children, then they are evicted from the residence. The management also has the power to perform a background check on any new applicants and can refuse to house citizens with a criminal background.

"When people live there, they sign a waiver saying 'I will not be involved in this type of activity while I live here,'" Allen said. "Criminals are not a federally protected criteria of people and the owners can say who they want to live there."

Currently, Mira Vista Apartments and Hidden Oaks Village are the only two certified housing communities on the Central Coast, though many more are on the way.

"This whole thing is a team effort," Allen said. "We do our job, management does their jobs and the residents do their part too."

For more information about the Atascadero Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program, call 461-5051.



Photo Courtesy of Richard Dutra

Senior police officer Michele Schamber performs K-9 demonstrations during the Hidden Oaks Village crime free safety social on April 29.