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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 1994

PHONE 564-0005

On watch for you

Blockwatch helps to stop flood of break and enters

By DAVID HEYMAN

Prince George Free Press

The citizens of Prince George have not exactly flocked to join crime prevention groups like Blockwatch, despite recently finding out they live in the break-in capital of B.C. And the woman leading the Blockwatch fight is disappointed in the response.

Heather Quiring, the group's assistant co-ordinator, says she has been receiving only the normal amount of inquiries at her office since the story broke. She says other cities, like those in the Lower Mainland, have reacted to their crime problems stronger than we have. "Their programs have grown a lot faster than they have here. Surrey, I think, is up to 25-thousand homes included in their Blockwatch.

"There are Blockwatch programs everywhere in the Lower Mainland, and I don't like to say it, but they seem to have much greater participation than ours."

Ms. Quiring says her main goal, as always, is to get more neighbourhoods involved, and to bring more blocks on line. While she says she's pretty proud of how many people have joined, she says it's simply not enough. "Absolutely not. There's 25-thousand, approximately, residences in Prince George and of those...about 16-hundred homes are involved."

The reason? According to Ms. Quiring, apathy. "I would probably say that the residents of Prince George can be somewhat apathetic. The ones that are very involved in their community are coming forward but there's still a lot of apathy."

Apathy is not a word to describe senior citizen John Rahier. Ms. Quiring says he's got to be the most active Blockwatch captain in the city. "He's so wonderful, and this is the most important thing in his life



Rahier: "Well, it helps...This street has very little problems. We have had a few break-ins, none this last while on this street." ROB BIRON/FREE PRESS

sometimes, I think. He's very active. He takes the program very, very seriously. Whenever somebody new comes into his neighbourhood, he

recruits them. He makes the point of going to their home and talking to them about the program and how successful it is on his street and he

recruits everybody."

Mr. Rahier says he's very serious about his job. "If I take something on I take it seriously whether it's Block-

watch or...cutting the lawn."

He has been living on McKenzie Avenue for four years and is just starting his third term as Blockwatch captain. He says, laconically, Blockwatch works. "Well, it helps...This street has very little problems. We have had a few break-ins, none this last while on this street." He says a break in attempt was made last year but something scared the thief away.

Obviously, Mr. Rahier is a big supporter of Blockwatch. "It's to teach people to keep their eyes and ears, especially their eyes open and if they see anything suspicious or if they see something happening then you phone it in." He says the people of Prince George are getting with the program, slowly. "Well, this street is number three from the time we started, it was the third one to join, and now there's 80-something, I believe."

Ms. Quiring is alternately optimistic and pessimistic about the future of Blockwatch in Prince George. She says her group has been gaining "a pretty captive audience in the last few months" but she says there's not much more they can do. "The program's been active for more than four years. It's pretty well a household name so it's just a matter of people wanting it badly enough to take the time to organize it."

Statistics from the Lower Mainland show that Blockwatch homes are hit less often than those not involved. Although there are no similar statistics for Prince George, Ms. Quiring says she feels it's the same here. "We haven't been able to keep any scientific statistics like that but I do monitoring every morning of all the break and enters that have happened and very, very rarely do I see any that (happen) to a Blockwatch home. Very rarely. And we have a lot of residential crime in Prince George."

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