

Neighbors take stock

◆ **Crime watch:**
 Leaders look at what has changed since officer's shooting.

By **CAROL ROBIDOUX**
 Union Leader Staff

MANCHESTER — Phase two of the city's renewed partnership with neighborhood watch groups officially launched last night during a two-hour session at police headquarters.

About 40 community watch leaders gathered to talk about what has changed — and what still needs improvement — since the shooting of a Manchester police officer last

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fall, which triggered a revival of old-fashioned neighborhood vigilance.

Cheryl Mitchell and Joe Labbe, who live in the neighborhood where Officer Michael Briggs was shot and killed in October, have since joined forces with about four other key neighbors. Together they have developed a system for monitoring streets and keeping neighbors informed through a monthly newsletter. They also unveiled T-shirts last night which they hope will catch on as a way to reinforce pride in their community as well as solidarity.

"We started out as a watch group, but we've expanded far beyond that," said Mitchell. "The biggest thing I've learned is that a lot of people in our community are very needy. They want to connect, but don't know how. We can't be afraid to reach out."

Others, such as West Side resident Chris Leone, pressed Sgt. Kevin Kincaid for updates on long-standing issues in his neighborhood.

"We were promised this West Side sub-station and a dedicated community officer, and that deadline is approaching. Is it gonna happen?" Leone asked Kincaid.

"March. We're training volunteers now, and by March we should have an officer over there. Not necessarily in the sub-station, but dedicated to the West Side," Kincaid said.

Fellow West-Sider Doris Tousignant wondered how to address trash and abandoned furniture, a chronic problem affecting quality of life.

Kincaid told Tousignant contacting police is a step in the right direction.

"It may not be a police issue, but we have contacts with other city services that can definitely help solve these problems," Kincaid said.

Jane Hills was hoping for more resources. She became interested in launching a watch group in her neighborhood, on

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CHERYL MITCHELL

the city's east side near Hillside Middle School, after a recent rash of daytime burglaries.

Last night she said police need to find a better way to keep residents informed of daily crime.

"Years ago they used to use the reverse 911 system, which worked pretty well. Now it seems maybe there should be a Web site where people could post information like that," Hills said.

Sgt. Dana Langton said police are working on providing links to individual watch group Internet sites through their home page.

He also announced that applications are being accepted for the next Citizen's Police Academy, which starts Feb. 15, a program that offers residents an inside look at police operations and enhanced watchdog skills.

Meena Gyawali from the city's planning department talked about the process of mapping Manchester's 24 neighborhoods using historic designations and landmarks to reinforce a sense of identity.

In conjunction with that, Will Stewart from NeighborWorks Greater Manchester displayed a series of oval stickers — SQG for Squag, indicating the West Side area along the Piscataquog River or WP for Wolf Park — which they hope will give residents a sense of renewed ownership.

"We hope that, along with that sense of ownership, residents will want to succeed in cleaning up problem areas and making improvements," Stewart said. "It's all about neighborhood pride."