

Neighborhood Crime-Busters Hail National Night Out

By Thomas Tracy

After 22 years, Brooklyn has definitely changed.

While the changes can be found everywhere, the transformation spurred on by two decades of decreased crime coupled with improved communication between the police and the public was definitely evident during Tuesday's National Night Out Against Crime Celebration, where thousands of residents joined cops to take back the night.

Not that the night needs to be wrested from the criminal element anymore.

Actually, instead of National Night Out Against Crime, the festivities hailed in every neighborhood from Coney Island to Canarsie should be called "Community Night," where each neighborhood celebrates in its own way and, as always, to the beat of its own drums.

During the August 2 event, precincts spanning the borough held everything from a barbecue to a street fair to a parade. Hundreds of people turned out at each event – a far cry from the first National Night Out Against Crime when only a handful of the bravest of the brave showed up.

"We marched to the Bergen field and got bitten up by all the mosquitoes," Flo Hirsch, the president of the 63rd Precinct Community Council remembered as she and an

army of children marched around Bergen Beach in their Night Out Against Crime shirts. When they were done, the children spent the rest of the night on carnival rides.

"We only had a few pastries," Hirsch remembered. "People really didn't know what it was all about and it took a few years for people to really know."

Hirsch said that there were only a few who celebrated the first National Night Out Against Crime in Bergen Beach. This year, a few hundred turned out to march.

The same could be said over in Canarsie, where kids noshed on hot dogs and played hoops in step to the beats fired off by a volunteer DJ.

To Captain Ralph Monteforte, the commanding officer of the 69th Precinct in Canarsie, the National Night Out Against Crime today is geared toward building stronger ties between the police and the children of the community.

"We want the young kids to know who their police officers are," said Monteforte. "It's not just a uniform, it's the person behind that uniform and we hope that if they see us in the community they can approach us when they need to."

"When we started, I was chairman of Community Board 18," said State Senator Carl Kruger, who visited a few

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Lt. Hernandez of the 62nd Precinct poses with little police officer Sunny Ou.



There was plenty of horsing around at the 62nd Precinct Night Out Against Crime celebration, thanks to the four legged members of the mounted unit.



Hundreds of residents turned out for the 62nd Precinct Night Out Against Crime Celebration.
Photos by Bob Hacken

Nabe Makes Crime-Busting a Fun-Filled Affair

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Night Out Against Crime events throughout the evening. "People felt that the criminal element was taking over the neighborhood. The concept of national Night Out Against Crime was to turn on your porch lights, open your front doors and go out and reclaim the parks and the streets we felt were being taken over by the hoodlums."

"Today, crime is at its lowest level," he added. "The cooperation between the community and the police is at the highest points. The neighborhood feels more of a camaraderie with the police because of these kinds of community events. It's turned into a great evening where people can spend a summer night walking around enjoying the community they live in."

"These days, National Night Out Against Crime is more about bringing the community together," said Captain Frank Cangiarella, the commanding officer of the 62nd Precinct in Bensonhurst and Bath Beach. On Tuesday, cops held a special barbecue and carnival for neighborhood children.

"[Night Out] is designed for people who

don't normally interact with the police, to give them the opportunity to know what we do and what's available to them. We open up our doors to people who are reluctant to reach out to us," Cangiarella said.

Kings County District Attorney Charles Hynes, who visited a number of locations throughout the night, said that he and Police Commissioner Ray Kelly have been talking about changing the name from National Night Out Against Crime to "The Night to Honor the Communities of this Country."

"[The Police Commissioner and I] have agreed it's crystal clear that the foundation of all of the changes we have celebrated over the years is the relationship between the police and community leaders," said Hynes. "I was at a clergy breakfast about four months ago and an imposing African American woman walks up to us and exchanges a kiss with Police Chief Cunneen."

Hynes said that the two started talking. He asked her if there were any problems and she said that in fact there were.

"She said that the Impact cops were too salty," Hynes recalled. "Cunneen was about to do something about it and she said, 'The

Inspector and I will take care of that.' That shows the investment that the woman has in this partnership."

"The police and I believe that that kind of

partnership is real and it wasn't always like that 25 years ago. There was more of an armed camp mentality in many communities and that's changed."



Curtis Sliwa and the Guardian Angels were on hand to join the fun at the 60th Precinct Night Out Against Crime.



Captain Vincent Stella, the commanding officer of the 61st Precinct, receives a special award from 61st Precinct Community Council President Joe Foy.



City Councilman Michael Nelson joins volunteers at the 61st Precinct National Night Out Against Crime Celebration.



Volunteers from Homecrest Community Services doled out the food at the 61st Precinct Night Out Against Crime.



Children hoola-hooped the day away at the 60th Precinct Night Out Against Crime in Coney Island.



The cops of the 60th Precinct, Police Officer Sean Ahern, Captain Thomas Burns, XO, Inspector Robert Johnsen, CO, and Police Officer John Nevandro get together for a picture.



61 Precinct Lt. Anthony D'Agastino blows up a ball for some youngsters.

Photos by Bob Hacken