



Newday / Art Mita

Paula Broxmeyer, a robbery victim, with son, Evan, 5

el snow and decorate the boarded-up homes of summer residents with holiday wreaths to give them a lived-in look.

And a coalition of Nassau civic associations has formed a countywide group of court-watchers who follow suspects of violent crimes through the legal system — because, member Eisner explains, "For too long the only role that decent, honest, peaceful citizens have had in the whole crime issue is the role of the victim."

The way to change that role, say experts, lies in community's willingness to help police. "We assume the police to be a lot better than they are," says Patrick Murphy, former New York City police commissioner and now the president of The Police Foundation. "Unless the police have community support, they won't be very effective."

Lynn A. Curtis, president of the Eisenhower Foundation for the Prevention of Violence, says the situation has caused a "rwinging back" to greater community involvement. "It's a very natural American-type process."

In recent years, fed-up citizenry once again has joined forces with police, forming a nationwide network of neighborhood anticrime groups that seem to have positive effects in the areas where they operate. They are most effective, says Milton Brown of the National Center for Crime Prevention, at reducing fear of crime by reducing visible signs of disorder — the litter, graffiti and abandoned autos that signal a community's lack of concern. The more than 200 volunteers who keep an eye on Elmont are as involved in community cleanup as they are in crime prevention and in Central Islip, the civilian patrol reports more broken street lights and potholes than burglaries-in-progress.

But experts are not sure that such groups are accomplishing their main mission: to deter criminal activity.

"You can't say there's a direct cause-and-effect at play," admits James Nolan of the Virginia-based National Center for Community Anticrime Programs. Part of the problem is the difficulty some watch and patrol groups have sustaining community involvement. In Paula Broxmeyer's community, the civilian patrol prospered. But many groups that form in response to a watch group crisis that form in response to the problem abates.

This kind of rise and fall took place in Lake Success last spring when residents formed a civilian patrol in retaliation against a wave of driveway robberies. More than 200 volunteers showed up at the first meeting, recalls Albert Greenhouse, one of the organizers, and

within 48 hours the patrol was disbanded because the bandits had been caught.

"That's the way it is. At first the concern is imminent, the momentum is there," says Matt Peakin, founder of the National Association of Town Watch and a long-time member of a patrol group in Lower Merion, Pa. "And then the problem goes away, time passes, or boredom sets in. It takes a commitment to get out there and really keep an eye on things."

Authorities such as Nolan feel that the groups that endure "are making a dent." A federally funded study of a watch group in Seattle, Wash., in 1977 — to date, one of a few in-depth evaluations — showed that the city's program had reduced the number of residential burglaries by 50 per cent, with no evidence that crime simply moved to nearby, unprotected areas. Such movement is known among experts as "displacement."

Still, some critics worry about citizens ganging up to fight crime on their own. The concerns range from vigilante-type tactics by patrol members to the harassment of blacks and other minorities in white communities. "We encourage the passive neighborhood watch thing, but the patrols have us concerned," said Gary Delahake, an official of the Nassau County Patrolmen's Benevolent Association.

"These patrols are a sign of community frustration and fear that the police department isn't protecting them. It's a potentially dangerous situation when you have whole groups of people feeling that they have to take matters into their own hands. We'd rather have a trained professional officer out there than a banker or accountant trying to do the job."

Silvy Ovaille, a housewife and mother of four who says she "has a job to do" in Central Islip. She remembers the Central Islip of 1975 as a community of broken windows and abandoned cars and boarded-up houses, a neighborhood wounded equally by vandals and those residents who retreated into their homes in fear. "Why should we have to go inside and close the door and pull down the shades because we're afraid to go outside?" she asks. "That only tells the criminals that we are giving up and that we don't care anymore. It's our responsibility to take the neighborhood over to them on a silver platter. That kind of attitude is the beginning of the end. It means the death of the neighborhood."

In Central Islip, Silvy Ovaille and her husband Tony decided to take matters into their own hands and start one of the Island's first civilian patrols. "We looked around to see what we needed to do to survive in this place because we knew we were going to stay here for awhile," Tony Ovaille says. "That's why we started this and that's why we're not about to let go."

Together, husband and wife policed the streets of their neighborhood — he behind the wheel of the family car, on the lookout for suspicious activity; she waiting at home to receive his check-in phone calls and, when necessary, relay the information to the police. Eight years later, they're still at it — only now they have a corps of almost 700 volunteers and an extensive CB radio communications system that has made their round-the-clock patrol of the entire Central Islip community among the more elaborate and effective civilian patrols on the Island.

Their success is measured, the couple says, by their group's rehabilitation effort in what was considered a deteriorating neighborhood; its anti-litter and anti-graffiti campaigns and its push for adequate street lighting; its successful efforts to close down "reefer houses" where drugs were being peddled to minors; its crisis hotline and telephone information referral service that operates out of Silvy Ovaille's living room-office.

Even criminals agree that the watchful eyes of the community make their jobs riskier. On an autumn night in 1982, Lawrence Hayes — a 23-year-old Coram man now serving 2 to 6 years at Adirondack Correctional Facility for a 1978 armed robbery — says that he and his band of thugs had targeted for robbery. "Anytime anybody's watching out for somebody it makes it harder," he said. "If I couldn't get in off the street without being seen, then I would have to put it off. You don't want to be seen walking into someone's yard."

Warns Robert Cooke, crime prevention officer in Suffolk's Sixth Precinct, where a network of more than 130 neighborhood watch groups covers much of the precinct's 200 square miles: "You can't say where you have a watch group you won't have a crime, or even that you'll have significantly less crime. It isn't that clear-cut. But if you make a community more secure you're bound to run some of the crime out of that area — whether it goes to the neighborhood around the corner or one 10 miles away, that I can't say, but the crime will move."

"That isn't necessarily a bad thing, Silvy Ovaille contends. "So it moves," she said. "That's good. I want it to

Fears and Precautions	
How afraid are you of the following? (Per cent saying very or somewhat worried; rest said not worried.)	
Car theft:	42.3%
Robbery outside of the home:	51.0
Your home being burglarized:	54.6
Murder:	33.2
Your property being vandalized:	54.1
Rape or sexual assault:	45.3
Being beaten up or assaulted:	42.5
People who say they'd be more likely to do the following:	
Always keep doors locked while at home:	76.3%
Put extra locks on doors or windows:	65.4
Get a watch dog:	45.2
Engrave valuables with some sort of identification:	39.0
Installed a burglar alarm:	34.3
Joined a neighborhood watch group:	27.1
Source: Newday poll of 1,451 Nassau and Suffolk residents, by Social Data Analysis, Inc., in April, 1983.	

Newday Chart/ Bob Graham

move — off of my street, out of my neighborhood, right out of my CI (Central Islip). And if it goes to your neighborhood I'll come in and show you how to get it out, but you have to want to get it out. You have to want to take the time and make the effort because being eyes and ears of the police — that's what we are, we never for a moment try to act like the police — is a very serious job."

It is early afternoon and Silvy Ovaille is driving her mustard-colored Furr up and down the streets of Central Islip. She wields the CB with elan, keeping the base station informed of her patrol path, cruising the neighborhood. To the untrained eye, the area looks peaceful. But Silvy Ovaille sees beyond the quiet streets — she makes note of an open garage door and a broken street light; she asks a man who is piling garbage and broken appliances in front of his house if he would like one of the large dumpsters the town supplies and carts away, for free; she writes down the license plate of an unfamiliar van that seems to show up at every turn.

This is the work of a suburban surveillance team — watch dog, remembering, taking detailed notes that are later logged at patrol headquarters. Patrol members never get out of their cars; they don't carry weapons; if they do happen upon a crime in progress they reach for the CB and the base station summons police. This is a look-and-tell service, a "neighborhood watch on wheels," that is meant only to be the eyes and the ears of the police.

"I know it's working," Silvy Ovaille says. "It's working because most of the time when you patrol it's like this — quiet and boring. You don't see a crime on every corner, not here in CI, not anymore. And it's because the criminals know someone is always watching in CI. They know that this community has its eyes wide open — morning, noon and night. That is our weapon and it's the best weapon any community could have."

It comes down to the "old-fashioned notion," Paula Broxmeyer says, that "crime stays in a community only if someone does it from within." In Central Islip, the fear of crime is a problem that affects all of us — we can't expect the police to take care of it, we can't expect the Legislature to take care of it, we all have to take care of it."

PREPARATION FOR THIS SERIES began in 1981 when Newday reporter Noel Rubinstein began collecting and analyzing data from police departments across Long Island. Last year he was joined by reporter Marie Cicco and together they compiled the basic data on the extent of crime and the fear of crime on Long Island.

In recent months more than a dozen Newday reporters were added to the project.

They included Carole Agus, Michael Alexander, Fred Brunning, Kenneth C. Crowe, Josh Friedman, Richard C. Friedman, Barbara Hightman, Herb Hightman, Lawrence S. Levy, John McDonald, Scott Minerbrook, Jim Mulvaney, Emily Sachar, Manny Topol, Irene Virag and Pat Vitello. Editorial assistance Karen Norlious, as well as librarians Mary Ann Skinner and Karen Van Rossem, assisted with the research.

Deputy Long Island Editor Harvey Aronson and Newday senior editor Joe Demma supervised the project under the overall direction of Long Island Editor Howard Schneider.