

# **Richland County Sheriff's Department**



**LEON LOTT**  
**Sheriff**

## **The Hollywood Hills Initiative to Reduce Crime**

In 1997 Leon Lott took over the helm of the Richland County Sheriff's Department and implemented problem solving community oriented policing to the County. Leon Lott's objective was to include, not exclude, citizens in reducing crime and creating safer communities. The success over the last 12 years has been because of the community's involvement and the implementation of education, awareness and enforcement as the cornerstone of the Sheriff's Department's mission.

One example, of many that Richland County has had, has been Richland County Sheriff's Leon Lott's project "The Hollywood Hills Initiative to Reduce Crime". This has been a multi-agency and community collaborative effort initiated in 2007 to combat the selling and using of narcotics in this community and to improve the quality of life in the area. The presence of narcotics in this community led to several violent crimes and numerous property crimes, which resulted in the citizens of the Hollywood Hills neighborhood to live in constant fear.

The initiative is a focused deterrence strategy, which is modeled after a similar Highpoint, North Carolina Initiative. This partnership among law enforcement, various social service agencies and the community helped to establish a clear message to criminals, "that crime is no longer tolerated in our community." The residents of this neighborhood and the Richland County Sheriff's Department have strengthened their relationship and are tackling this problem as partners with the same goal in mind – a community free of crime.

Crime has reduced by fifty percent since the induction of this program on September 30, 2007. In 2007, we had 108 reported crimes in this community as of March 2009 we only had 59 reported crimes. The Hollywood Hills Community largest criminal offenses were the selling and using of narcotics. When this initiative began, there were 29 reported narcotic cases in this neighborhood, and as of May 1, 2009 there are only two reported narcotic cases.

This initiative relies on delivering a message of specific deterrence to those who generate and sustain a culture of violence, coupled with support services to facilitate the transition to a nonviolent lifestyle. The purpose of the Hollywood Hills' initiative is to dramatically and quickly reduce the frequency of street violence in Hollywood Hills and continually reduce the frequency over time. The Richland County Sheriff's Department is dedicated to insuring that those who choose violence receive their due diligence and those who choose to transition to a nonviolent lifestyle receive the appropriate services in the most effective, efficient and respectful manner possible.

### **How did we get here:**

Sheriff Leon Lott recognized the continued increase in crime in the Hollywood Hills area, the concerns of the community were apparent and citizens had grown intolerable to the criminal activity that was taking place. With those new developments a partnership formed between Sheriff Leon Lott, the Richland County Solicitors Office, a local food bank, a local Good-Will supplier, Job Corps and the Richland County Recreation Commission to create opportunities for those that wanted to transition to a nonviolent lifestyle.

The next step that was taken entailed Richland County Sheriff's Department becoming a constant presence in the Hollywood Hills community for six months; gathering documentation, evidence, witness statements, suspect activity, and the concerns of the citizens. This was accomplished through constant law enforcement presence with marked units, and several undercover operations.

An extensive investigation took place, countless meetings and strategic planning all aided in the combating of crime in this neighborhood. Sheriff Lott along with the Solicitor's office, several community leaders, clergymen, and members of the pastoral alliance called a meeting with all known criminals that occupied residence in the Hollywood Hills community or those that frequented the area.

When these known culprits entered the meeting facility they were greeted with pictures hanging from the wall of major drug dealers that had been arrested, pictures of the houses that were being used to solicit drugs and additional incriminating evidence. As the nine offenders took their seats, Sheriff Lott and the Solicitor explained to each of them, that they were invited to this meeting because the neighborhood and the law enforcement community were no longer going to tolerate their criminal behavior. Sheriff Lott and the Solicitor told each of the nine criminals that they had committed enough crimes that they could be arrested right then; but because they wanted to create a new dynamic and take a different approach to combating crime in this neighborhood they would be given a second chance. They would serve as an example to the rest of the community that change can happen. The offenders were given specific instructions that they could not engage in any criminal activity anywhere, they could not be affiliated with known criminals, and any mention of any illegal activity would activate their warrant and they would go directly to jail. Sheriff Lott expressed that this initiative was not done to come in and lock up everyone in the neighborhood but to eliminate the sources of the criminal activity and make the citizens of Hollywood Hill feel safe again.

Sheriff Lott expressed to them that this was their second chance in life and they had to make good on it or they would spend an extensive amount of time in jail. They were given several options by local social service agency that if their primary reason for engaging in illegal activities were to provide for their families, they could receive food, clothing or shelter at no cost. They were offered assistance from Job Corps to aid them in finding employment or they could take advantage of the free training, where they could learn a new skill that would increase their chances of finding a job. Sheriff Lott points out to them that these are the alternatives, you no longer have a justifiable reason for continuing to engage in criminal activities.

The Richland County Sheriff's Department provided twenty-four hour, seven days a week presence in the Hollywood Hills Community for thirty days after the operation was complete. There were two deputies assigned to this community that constantly monitored the activities and provided the security to the community that they needed during this thirty day time frame and the results of this initiative are still apparent today. Of those nine offenders only one arrest was made, of the remaining eight some have moved out of the community and the rest have transitioned to a nonviolent lifestyle.

### **What we are doing now:**

The Richland County Sheriff's Department patrols this neighborhood several times a day, and meets with the neighborhood association monthly. Sheriff Lott executes periodic thirty-day blitzes through this neighborhood which involves the Sheriff's Department keeping a constant police presence, twenty-four hours a day for that thirty-day period.

### **Results:**

This community no longer lives in fear. They know the Richland County Sheriff's Department cares about their safety and their quality of life. The citizens in this neighborhood are confident in their ability to keep their neighborhood free of crime and they know the Sheriff's department is there to respond to any issues they may have.

The relationship that was established between the Richland County Sheriff's Department and the Hollywood Hills Community will be the driving force behind the continued success of this program.