AVP 7-16-11 Lancaster marks milestone in fighting crime

Yearly or quarterly crime statistics give you big numbers on the total incidents of crime in our community's two main cities, Lancaster and Palmdale, with their combined population of more than 300,000 residents.

It's always nice to see those numbers going down, as they have been for several years now. You know it's a good thing, but it's not always easy to get a feel for exactly what the numbers actually mean.

That's why an announcement made by Lancaster this past week caught our attention. The city for several years has been mapping crimes, meaning keeping track of where crimes occur so as to better know how to combat it. There are some 28 districts across the city's 90 square miles.

In the week of June 12, for the first time since they started keeping track, none of the city's crime-mapping districts recorded more than five serious crimes for the week.

The city uses the FBI categories for serious crime: Homicides, rapes, robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries, larceny, vehicle thefts and arson.

Jim Kobolt, the city's senior criminal justice analyst, made the announcement in a meeting with the city's Criminal Justice Commission.

So even in the city's roughest neighborhoods, formally the sites of multiple serious crimes per day, things were pretty calm.

The most frequent of those serious crimes is burglary, and officials were able to track a spike in burglaries in one zone earlier this year and step up enforcement there to get a handle on it. That's the advantage of tracking the crimes, and seeing trends and heading them off before they pick up steam.

Capt. Bob Jonsen, the new Lancaster Sheriff's Station commander who worked for years with Capt. Bobby Denham, the Palmdale Sheriff's Station commander, is especially adept at seeing crime trends.

Said criminal justice analyst Kobolt: "The real story here is (Capt.) Bob Jonsen. He knows data and how to apply it to the field, Jonsen and his whole crime management team. Jonsen is one of many police leaders looking at the data and basing his decisions on that."

Kobolt said they have software that allows them to do a time series analysis of crime data going back to Jan. 1, 2000, and they can predict, for example, where hot areas will be in July. "When we measure against ourselves, we can show where we're making progress and
where we need to work."

It seems to be working. Now the goal will be to have every zone reporting five or fewer crimes for two weeks in a row. Then three. Then