AVP 1-2-12 Homicides drop for 5th straight year

By: Jennifer Santos

The number of people murdered in the Antelope Valley went down in 2011 for the fifth consecutive year, to the lowest level in 10 years.

Homicides numbered 18 in the Los Angeles County portion of the Antelope Valley this year, down one from 2010, according to a preliminary analysis of crime reports.

Of the deaths, only one appears to be related to killings between gangs, and nine are domestic violence or killings by family members, records show.

The number of homicides is likely to change in the official tally because sometimes deaths that are reported as possible homicides turn out to be something else. Deaths also get added to the list after autopsies confirm them as homicides.

In some cases a killing is ruled to be justifiable self-defense, sometimes much later.

But even one death is too much for sheriff's officials.

"Our strategies on crime reduction have definitely paid off," said Capt. Bobby Denham, commander of the Palmdale Sheriff's Station. "Even though there's still work to be done, we will continue with these strategies and new ones in order to achieve our success in the coming year."

Four children top this year's homicide list, with the youngest AV victims being two five-
month old infants. The first child, whose name is still withheld, was killed as a result of an overdose in the 8800 block of west Avenue D-10. The second was Christopher Glass Jr., who was fatally stabbed by his 17-year-old father while fleeing from sheriff's deputies.

Glass was shot to death that same day by deputies after he broke into a family's house.

The oldest victim was 62-year-old Aurora Ortiz Reynosa, who was shot in the head by her husband in the 3100 block of Shale Road sometime between Jan. 26 and the early hours of Jan. 27. Los Angeles County Sheriff's Homicide officials said Reynosa's husband Richard, 64, shot his wife before turning the gun on himself.

Officials said the murder-suicide appeared to be planned.

Aurora Reynosa was an invalid and had breathing problems, arthritis and other medical conditions, homicide investigators said.

While detectives have no idea of what spurred the shootings, the couple had told family, seemingly in jest, that if things got too bad for them they would commit suicide. Their bodies were found by an adult daughter, who had come to the house to check on them after not hearing from them in a few days.

"When people are enraged in a domestic situation, it requires action on the part of law enforcement whenever there is a threat of violence," Denham said. "It's volatile and this year is no exception.

"Those are situations that if we just got them past these moments of rage, these moments could have been avoided."

Among the people killed on the list, 10 were shot, three were stabbed, two died of a blunt force trauma, one suffocated, another overdosed and two others were bodies that were found dead.

On Sept. 20, the body of Hykeen Brown was found in the vicinity of east Avenue R-5 and 137th Street East. Homicide detectives said Brown died of a gunshot wound. Brown was reported missing under suspicious circumstances on June 2. Investigators believe he was killed at a different location than where his body was found.

On Oct. 19, a body was found on Tucker Ranch Road north of Acton. At first, horseback riders spotted a skull and phoned law enforcement to report what they saw in the area of Peaceful Valley Road. The body is still unidentified.

Between the two sheriff's stations, the Palmdale station had 15 homicides and Lancaster had three, the lowest murder rate in over a decade, sheriff's officials said.

Capt. Bob Jonsen, commander of the Lancaster Sheriff's Station, attributed the low murder rate to the creation of new specialized teams of deputies and the community.

"We've just become very pro-active against violent crime," Jonsen said. "We've added the
Robbery Suppression Team and I think having that constant message that violence will not be tolerated is starting to make an impact."

Jonsen said the redevelopment on Lancaster Boulevard and the events concentrated in that area put on by the city of Lancaster have also helped to create a more safe and family environment.

"I think it's a collective effort and not just what we're doing," Jonsen said. "What's unique with Lancaster is that they have really been successful with creating an environment that has a community feeling, you don't sense any danger or any sense of gang activity (during their events) and I think the community feeling is spreading outward of the boulevard."

In 2012, Jonsen said he plans to keep things at the Lancaster station the way they currently are but in addition, he would like to build more partnerships into the neighborhoods.

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