AVP 5-11-12 Stopping crime in future begins with their pasts

By: Craig Currier

LANCASTER - People with prior criminal histories dating back several years - not necessarily those on active probation or parole - were responsible for nearly half the violent crimes committed in Lancaster over the last 12 months, a city crime analyst said this week.

Noting a recent increase in serious crimes committed in Lancaster, Criminal Justice Analyst Jim Kobolt told city officials Wednesday that 43% of those arrested for serious crimes since May 1, 2011, have been people with criminal histories who are not on probation or parole.

City officials are responding to the first reported crime spike in five years, during which serious crime jumped 27% in Lancaster.

"It's normal to see fluctuations in crime," Kobolt told the Lancaster Criminal Justice Commission at its monthly meeting. "It's nice to think that we can constantly bring it down more and more, but at some point in time we have to be realistic about it. We have to understand what's going on."

Specifically, there have been six homicides in the city during 2012 as compared to two during the same period last year, Kobolt said.

The Criminal Justice Commission in recent months has focused much of its attention on the state's prison realignment laws designed to cut costs and inmate population by shifting responsibility for certain lower-level offenders to the county government agencies.

While the impact of the state's plan is not yet known, Kobolt said existing data shows the majority of arrests in the city involve people who are not on any type of post-release supervision but who have a criminal background.

Of all arrests made for crimes that occurred in Lancaster since May 1, 2011, Kobolt said 38% of those arrested had criminal histories but were not on active probation or parole. In the same category, 22% of the people arrested were on probation and 9% were on parole.

Lt. Ed Raulston of the Lancaster Sheriff's Station said authorities are using Kobolt's crime maps, which show where criminal activity was concentrated in the past, in their efforts to corral the recent problems. The maps, city officials said, can be used generally to predict where future crimes will occur.

"We're deploying units to address crime issues in the retail centers and on (Lancaster Boulevard)," Raulston said. "We've also conducted some saturation operations in the retail centers."

Statistics released last month show serious crimes rose from 936 to 1,198 in Lancaster between Jan. 1 and April, compared to the same period last year.

Serious crime, which includes homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, theft and arson, remains markedly down from five years ago. Serious crimes from Jan. 1 to April 5, 2007, numbered 4,706 in Lancaster, according to the Sheriff's Department in a report.

The upswing follows the shift in responsibility between state corrections officials and county...
authorities, but Lancaster Mayor R. Rex Parris said last month he believes the increase also is a direct result of community activists criticizing three recent deputy-involved shootings. Parris said in April the groups have drummed up "imaginary problems" and have caused deputies to "back off" in incidents that have racial overtones.

"We cannot enforce our criminal law on racial distinctions," Parris said. "People are getting a pass, and now that fist has turned and opened up to a velvet glove."

Crime went up in unincorporated communities as well as in the cities, though crime is far less frequent there than in Palmdale and Lancaster, records show.

The statistics cited by Kobolt only include crimes that occurred within city limits, though the Lancaster Sheriff’s Station patrols other communities, as well.

In Lake Los Angeles, Quartz Hill and other unincorporated areas patrolled by Lancaster Sheriff’s Station deputies, the crime rate increased 33.1%.

The serious crime total there between Jan. 1 and April 5 was 195, up from 139 during the same period a year ago.

In Littlerock, Acton and other unincorporated areas patrolled by Palmdale Sheriff’s Station deputies, the crime rate increased 58.2%.

The serious crime total there between Jan. 1 and April 5 was 242, up from 153 a year earlier.

ccurrier@avpress.com