

Crime Watch

By John Dyer

They'll Be Watching You

Group helps break cycle of Upper West Side crime

While Mayor Rudolph Giuliani celebrates the city's low crime rate, some Upper West Siders enjoy their safe neighborhoods in a more reserved, but no less vigilant way.

The Police Liaison Group (PLG) has been active on the Upper West Side for eight years, operating on a model that runs parallel to the mayor's "zero tolerance" policy on crime.

"It was really a group of conscientious residents who came together because of deteriorating conditions in the neighborhood," said Jill Greenbaum, who heads the group.

With around 13 members, the group carries out the policing philosophy the mayor has espoused for years. Greenbaum said the PLG believes in the "broken windows" theory of crime: that decrepit street conditions lead to minor crimes and that minor crimes lead to serious crimes and larger social problems. By not tolerating factors that begin the cycle, she

said, neighborhoods create an atmosphere that discourages illicit activity.

Take graffiti, said Greenbaum. A neighborhood that ignores problems with graffiti leaves itself open to the ills that often accompany young people vandalizing property. The kids start drinking; to drink they need money; for money they start panhandling, harassing passersby and pickpocketing.

The group is like any other neighborhood watch program, except that it is rigorously organized. Covering the streets near Broadway around the high 80s and low 90s, its members keep a watch on the comings and goings of suspicious people and situations - perennial loiterers, for example, or areas where broken bottles and other evidence of nighttime socializing and possible drug use may be found.

Then, once a month, said Greenbaum, its members meet, collate their information and pass it on to the 24th Police Precinct. By handing their list of concerns

to the cops as a group, she said, they avoid identifying themselves individually in public and thus don't fear reprisals. Their meetings are closed and people don't advertise their membership in the group for the same reason, Greenbaum said.

"It's very efficient. It's laid out. We have a paper trail for eight years. That's the crux of the organization," she said.

The group takes a proactive stance, too. In the past, said Greenbaum, members conducted prostitution sweeps around Riverside Drive and West End Avenue, shining flashlights into the niches where prostitutes and their clients con-

ducted business. They've also written letters to councilmembers and other city officials on upcoming legislation, such as the law, passed in 1996, that makes panhandling around ATMs illegal.

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Tom Burnett, president of the 24th Precinct Community Council and a member of the group, said the group works wonderfully. "It's an excellent source of getting info from residents right to the beat officers and the community policing

sergeant," he said. Someone in the police department is listening. In March, Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik is scheduled to address a meeting organized by the liaison group. ■

Severed Finger

An angry pit bull bit off a man's finger on Friday, Feb. 2, report police.

At 8 a.m., the man, 31, tried to break up a fight between two dogs. In the process, one bit and severed his finger. He was taken to Roosevelt Hospital. Police ticketed the dog's owner for not having the pit bull on a leash.

Thumbtack Hoodlums

A group of teenagers and children accosted pedestrians with thumbtacks in Midtown on Monday, Jan. 29, police report.

Two women, both 28, complained of being pricked in the arm and thigh on separate occasions - at 5 p.m. at 43rd Street and Broadway and at 6:30 p.m. at 42nd Street and Broadway.

hit Josue Luis, 21. Singh's cab was not licensed. He had been illegally picking up fares. His two passengers at the time of the accident were not injured. Luis was brought to Bellevue in serious condition.

Singh had also been drinking. He was arrested for dri-

63rd Street and Columbus Avenue on Wednesday, Jan. 31, report police.

The woman, 67, was crossing against the light at 6 p.m. when the taxi hit her. She was taken to Roosevelt Hospital, where she died. The driver was not arrested or ticketed.