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Notice, enforcement, education tame crime at Memphis apartments

By Zack McMillin

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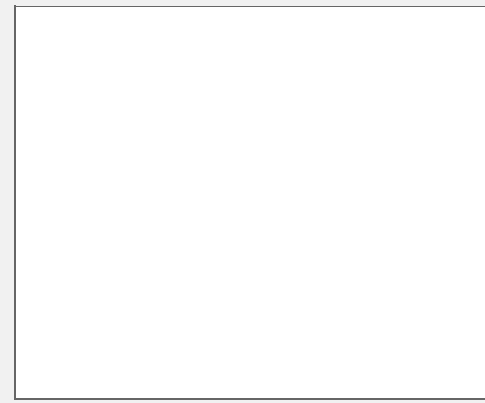


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At Kensington Manor Apartments, LEDIC Management Group employee James Douglas wipes off graffiti from a sign warning trespassers they could be subject to arrest or search. The SAFEWAYS program ties police, prosecutors and educators to cut crime.

The newest crime-fighting tool in the arsenal of the Memphis Police Department and the Shelby County District Attorney General's office is not exactly high-tech.

It is, very simply, a sign, and as far as LEDIC Management Group chief executive and president Pierce Ledbetter is concerned, the results at two of his company's apartment properties speak for themselves. Designed with input from the Shelby County District Attorney General's office, they are "No Trespassing" signs with a twist.



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Maintenance worker Charles Williams plays with Tamika Hawkins' dog, Doby, during their daily walk at the once-beleaguered Kensington apartments. "It's definitely gotten better," said 70-year-old Herbert Hall, a 30-year resident.

Residents and guests at two of LEDIC's complexes -- Autumn Ridge in Hickory Hill and Kensington Manor in Parkway Village -- also see a logo on the signs for Project SAFEWAYS, an initiative aimed at reducing crime in apartment complexes that involves Memphis police, the DA's office, the University of Memphis' CBANA program and the Southeast Shelby County Community Development Corporation.

The project does include some new cameras, but Ledbetter believes the DA office's decision to use trespassing as sufficient cause for arrest or search deserves most of the credit for huge reductions in crime in his properties.

A federal grant of \$2.2 million is funding SAFEWAYS, which is set to expand this year.

"My opinion is that the signs and enforcement and education of residents about the laws is most of the reason," Ledbetter said. "Eighty percent of SAFEWAYS' effectiveness is from that alone."

SAFEWAYS was tested at Autumn Ridge first, in the spring, and yielded results. Those involved say the success there is part of a promising trend of crime reduction in Hickory Hill that is also tied to the MPD's data-driven Blue Crush initiative.

Debra McIntosh, a LEDIC manager involved with Autumn Ridge, said residents were encouraged to notify the office or police when they saw suspicious people. Law enforcement then could show up and demand the suspicious person say where they lived or name an apartment resident they were visiting.

If they had no answer, they were subject to arrest or warrant search -- as the "No Trespassing" SAFEWAYS signs posted prominently throughout the complex explain.

"I think it increased the sense of community and people felt comfortable reporting a crime," said McIntosh. "We had neighbors that lived across the hall from one another and never knew they were neighbors, but because of this program they got to know one another and look out for one another."

Crime was a larger problem at Kensington Manor when Ledbetter asked to expand the pilot program there.

Over a 30-day period in early spring, there were 57 criminal incidents reported at



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Jennifer Aquino tries to drag her mother, Rosalia, to the Kensington playground. Plans are underway to expand SAFEWAYS to other complexes.

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Santa Rita Wine Dinner at Texas de Brazil Memphis Texas de Brazil			6 p.m.
Tiger basketball vs. UTEP FedExForum			7 p.m.
Grizzlies at New Orleans New Orleans Arena			7 p.m.
"Under the Sea" Crew Training International IMAX Theater			9 a.m.

Kensington, many of them major. By late summer, after SAFEWAYS signs went up, the commander of the Mt. Moriah Station that oversees Kensington was giving glowing reports of a turnaround.

"Kensington is going better than we ever anticipated," Michael Rallings, now deputy chief, told his fellow commanders in August. "We've had no serious incidents in the last 21 days."

LEDIC provided statistics that show 49 incidents for the three-month period from August-October, many of them misdemeanors like vandalism or simple assault.

"What's amazing to me is the crime has gone down although the reporting is going up," Ledbetter said.

Seventy-year-old Herbert Hall, who has lived at Kensington for almost 30 years, has been pleased with the changes.


"It's definitely gotten better," Hall said. "It's changed a whole lot. You see the security guards and police, they talk to people. I think that stopped a whole lot of things."

Ledbetter said LEDIC's presence in other markets has created some buzz not just in this area but also around the country.

He said plans are already underway to expand SAFEWAYS to complexes owned by other management companies, and believes that is essential -- otherwise, those residents who create problems will just move away from places with vigilant communities to those with more lax standards.

Vivian Johnson moved into Kensington Manor about the time SAFEWAYS was implemented, in part because she knew LEDIC manager Betsy Waugh from her time at another complex. Johnson and her immediate neighbors have followed up on the SAFEWAYS initiative by forming their own informal Neighborhood Watch group.

"It really is a community spirit now," Johnson said. "I told Betsy, 'I don't know what y'all are doing. Just keep doing it.'"

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