

TRI-CITY HERALD

OPINION

Our Voice: Tri-City gang crimes going down, let's keep it that direction

Published: April 10, 2013

The statistics tell us major crime was down last year in Benton County. The sheriff's office tells us a big piece of that is a result of the newly operating gang unit.

Our gut feeling is that there still seem to be plenty of lights and sirens and stories for our crime reporter to cover. Our instinct tells us that community safety is a vital service, and we have to keep the momentum going.

Major crime was down significantly, dropping 13 percent from 2011 to 2012. However, violent crime was up by 7 incidents during that same time period. And 2013 appears to be off to a bad start.

Although not all crimes are gang related, targeting gangs seems like a smart approach. It focuses limited resources where they'll have the most impact.

Of course, statistics indicate you're in more danger of being killed by someone you live with than a random gang member. Preventing domestic violence needs to be at the forefront of public safety efforts.

Gangs members typically hurt each other, but they're not so discriminating when it comes to stealing a car or breaking into a house.

And sometime innocent bystanders are swept up in the violence. This community forever will mourn the loss of Coach Bob Mars, who was stabbed to death by two teens in Benton City in 2004 during what some authorities have described as a gang initiation.

Staying out of the gang's way will not always protect you.

Criminals are like water; they flow to the path of least resistance.

In the Tri-Cities, we're resistant.

It's probably unrealistic to think that we're going to stop crime. But we can greatly decrease it in the Mid-Columbia by making sure gangs members -- and other criminals - meet with plenty of resistance. Hence the gang task force.

Unfortunately, the effort sometimes just pushes the problem to another community. There need to be no safe havens for criminal gangs.

Of course, a better solution would be to intervene before kids get into a gang. Give them a good education and arm them with a sense of community belonging.

This is part of what the Benton County Gang Enforcement Team does.

Early last year they made house calls to known gang members, took down the names of new members and offered help getting out of gangs to those already in trouble.

They talked to parents and trailer park managers and school administrators. They created a net to trap gang members, and a network to help those who want out.

And looking at the numbers, they're making progress. It's a good start.

Let's hold the ground we have fought so hard to gain and dig in for the rest of the battle.