

Crime being dealt with

Written by T. Rob Brown (aka Roberto Chocolate)

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The residents have since met with the local police who began a crack-down and arrested five individuals. Local residents feel they have identified the culprits and are breathing easier. No additional crimes have been reported since the arrests. Roberto

Expat Community Comes Together Against Crime in Panama's Beaches

Written by Jamuna Burry

Wednesday, 05 January 2011

Driven by a crime wave in Panama's Pacific Beach neighborhoods, that has people in the grip of fear, Owen Rayfield owner of Cholo's Restaurant, a popular Mexican eatery in Coronado is taking a stand against fear and for the community.

He has called the community to come out and meet him at the Coronado Police Station to help find answers. "What do we need to do here? Do we need to hire our own detective? What do the police need us to do to assist them?" These are some of the questions, Owen hopes to have answered.

A number of violent break-ins have terrorized the community over the last few months. Robbers have broken into people's homes and local restaurants, stealing valuables and beating people.

Todo al Carbon, a local restaurant in Coronado was visited by criminals a few months back. Owner Vladimir Trigueros says, "4 or 5 masked men came in close to closing time. They tied everyone up, and put a knife to my throat. They beat and kicked us, took money and cell phones". Vladimir says, one of the staff recognized one of the criminals, and gave Police their name. However the Police were unable to make an arrest. The incident frustrated Vladimir. "We are on our own here", he says.

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Other incidents include an man in Gorgona, whose home was broken into. He too was tied, beaten and robbed; A young woman in San Carlos, faced the same treatment; Kevin Painter in San Jose, who's son was shot and wounded in an exchange with the robbers is another incident. Kevin's home had high fences, security light and dogs; Most recently Richard and Lise Burkart in Coronado were broken into. This time the criminals committed rape. Clearly the crimes have been getting bolder. People fear, that if left unchecked Panama's beautiful Pacific beach areas could become as dangerous as the Colon City.

Being a business owner in the community, Owen Rayfield is well aware of the negative effect these crimes have in the area. "People are scared and we will loose people who want to come here to live and visit. I want to keep living here. This is where we want our children and grandchildren to come."

The frustration comes from the inability of the Police to take action. "A policeman who came to my house recently", says Owen "knew the names and faces of the people selling drugs in the area and who were involved in shootings, but they are unable to pin the crimes on them". Knowing is not enough, evidence needs to be collected and used to link individuals to crimes.

Owen believes the criminals live in the small community of Tumbo Muerto, an area behind Mrs. Mendoza Restaurant. "Everyone knows who they are. Even the honest people who take the bus to work in your house know who they are, and are afraid of them. I have lived in Las Lajas for 6 years. The bars on my windows and chain link fence has been in place only in the last 4 months. These guys are getting bolder";

At this afternoon's meeting, Owen hopes that the Police will get the message that the community wants to help eradicate crime in the area. "We all need to work together", he says "We want a police force who will respond to us. Who will come when we call and who can respond to the crime in the area. We want to know what we can do to help the police do their jobs. I want to know what we can do as a group to protect ourselves?";

Owen is not alone in his efforts. Richard Burkart has also been working hard to pull together a group of people who are interested in a solution. Perhaps the focused attention to the matter is already paying off, today 2 of the criminals who fit the description of several area crimes were arrested, and others have been identified.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: A total of five individuals have now been arrested, and no additional crimes have been reported since the arrests. Roberto