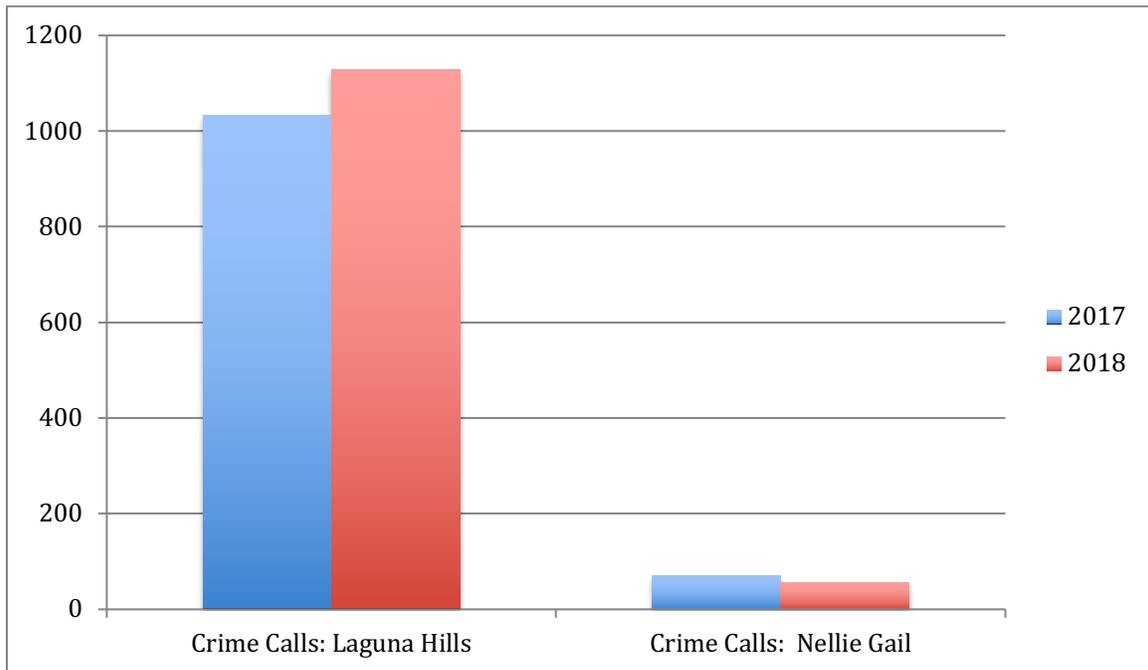


Home Security, Part II

Last month's article on Home Security, continued reports of crime, as well as recent concerns expressed by residents at our HOA Board Meetings have prompted numerous questions revolving around the topic of home protection. Many have asked, "what else can I be doing to protect my home and family." This month's article will attempt to answer some of these questions.

The concerns of the residents are valid. Crime increases our fears and affects our property values. It should be noted, however, that a search of the Orange County Sheriff's Department website shows a 20% decrease of reported crime in Nellie Gail Ranch in 2018 when compared with 2017. In Nellie Gail Ranch, there were 56 reported crimes in 2018 vs. 70 in 2017. Of particular interest is that overall reported crimes in all of Laguna Hills is up 9.2% in the same time period, with 1129 reported crimes in 2018 vs. 1034 reported crimes in 2017. This data was obtained by going to ocsd.org, clicking on "crime stats by area". Because the website only lists street names where the crime occurred, one must then separate non-Nellie Gail street names in the review.

The chart below summarizes the findings:



At press time, there has also been a reported armed robbery occurring during the day here in Nellie Gail Ranch. Previous reports of criminal activity have primarily been about burglaries (where residents were not home). In these situations, the

criminal burglar purposely avoids confrontation by entering homes when residents are likely to be away. The recent report of a brazen armed robber during the daytime further heightens the fear of many because now the criminal element is not afraid to encounter the homeowner. Although residents are rightfully concerned, it should be noted that armed robberies in our area are an extremely rare occurrence. According to the same Orange County Sheriff's Department website mentioned above, there were seven reports of assault with a firearm or robbery with a firearm in all of Laguna Hills in 2017, none of which were in Nellie Gail, and most occurring in commercial or retail establishments. In 2018, there were no reports of a firearm used in an assault or robbery in all of Laguna Hills. Nonetheless, even one report of an armed assault or robbery has raised the concern of residents and causes us to consider what we can we do should we ever come upon such a situation at home.

HOME PROTECTION

It is worth re-iterating that the constant and vigilant awareness of your surroundings is the single most important tool you have to combating criminal activity. Criminals are opportunists; they generally seek unoccupied, poorly lit homes, and in the case of the latest armed robbery, they seek those who are inattentive and vulnerable. Victims of armed encounters often state that the perpetrator "came out of nowhere," yet we know that this is not possible. Inattention is a better explanation; it is more likely that we didn't know where that perpetrator came from because we weren't paying attention. We also must never have the attitude that "it can't happen to me." Denial, coupled with a lack of awareness, are attributes that put you at higher risk of being a victim.

Before you get home. On March 6, 2019, two suspects were apprehended in Los Angeles County for "bank jugging", where thieves would observe bank customers withdrawing cash, follow them home or to their next destination and steal the cash from the customers. These two thieves were believed to have committed these crimes in both Los Angeles and Orange counties. Not only will criminals follow individuals from banks, but it is common for these criminals to follow their victims from the mall or shopping areas as well, and confront homeowners in their own garage. If you believe you are being followed, don't pull into your driveway. Professional driving instructors involved in protection detail will teach you to make "three left turns" to determine if you are indeed being followed. The likelihood of any random person behind you making three consecutive left turns is low. If you are being followed, continue driving but stay on well-traveled streets, call 9-1-1 and let law enforcement know of your location and direction of travel. Do not try to evade them. If nearby, drive to the sheriff's substation (Laguna Hills Civic Center) or other law enforcement facility. Even if you are not followed, be aware of areas around the exterior of your home where criminals can hide and gain entry into your garage when you arrive home. Keep the areas around your garage well lit and well trimmed from vegetation. Again, being aware is your tool of choice.

Alarms. Despite being an effective first line of defense, FBI studies show that over 80% of homeowners do not use their home alarm system. Regular use of your alarm will be an effective deterrent. Additionally, home alarm systems often have remote panic buttons and/or disarming codes that will still notify law enforcement if you enter the “panic” code. Contact your alarm company or review your alarm system’s manual to utilize these important features. Another potential alarm one can use is on their car keys. Most key fobs have a panic button that can be used to set off the car alarm. Homeowners can keep their car keys on their nightstand, ready to set off their car alarm should it be needed.

Electronic Control Devices. Electronic Control Devices (“Tasers”) are available for civilian use. There are basically two types of Tasers: one that shoots wired barbs a distance of 15 feet providing a 30 second shock, and the other is a contact device that must be applied to the body of an intruder. The contact devices come in a variety of sizes, from smaller devices that can fit in a pocket or purse, to larger prod-like sizes that are often advertised as safety devices to be used on coyotes or other animals when outdoors. Regardless of whether you get the device that shoots the barbs or you get the contact devices, both require training and re-training. Law enforcement trains with the Taser annually; civilians should do so more frequently.

Chemicals. Pepper spray (oleoresin capsicum) is the most common chemical device for self-protection. These personal sprays are generally only effective at distances of 3-6 feet. One should be aware that when one deploys pepper spray as directed, it is common to have the spray splash back into the sprayer’s face causing the same burning sensation as the intruder being sprayed. Be prepared. Another alternative is to use “bear spray,” which also contains oleoresin capsicum but at a lower concentration. Bear spray has a distinct advantage in that it can spray a distance of 25-30 feet and is available at most camping stores.

Firearms. A firearm can be an effective home defense tool in the right circumstances. Typically this is a tool of last resort, when other tools have failed or are unavailable. It is recognized, however, that this can also be a controversial subject. It is not the author’s intention to persuade or dissuade the use of a firearm for defensive purposes, but to emphasize that when one has a legal right to own a firearm, that person must be well-trained and well-versed on the concept of self-defense before considering its use. Training is critical as use of a firearm is an extremely perishable skill; shooting at cans or a paper target once a year is recreation, not training. Should this be your home defense tool of choice, you should obtain professional opinions and training on what is best for your situation as there are many options, more than can be discussed in this article.

Safe Room. A safe room, where one can securely hide, can be an effective and a life-saving self-defense tool. This is usually a secure room in your home that you can quickly access and safely secure from an intruder. Details of an effective safe room are too numerous to mention in this article. Suffice it to say that a safe room will likely require significant planning and structural changes to an interior room in

your home. These can be minimal changes to a walk-in closet or elaborate changes in an entire bedroom. Those that are interested can consult a contractor or the numerous websites available on how to build an effective safe room.

In summary, there are many potential tools to use for home protection. The most important tool is a heightened state of awareness. Maintaining this awareness can be an effective deterrent helping you avoid a confrontation, which is ALWAYS the best option. When a confrontation can't be avoided, then one should have alternative tools available, but whichever tool you choose, you MUST constantly practice with that tool. Having the tools but not being able to use them effectively can be worse than not having the tools at all.

About the Author:

Dr. Kenneth Cheng is a 21-year resident of Nellie Gail Ranch and a member of the Nellie Gail Emergency Preparedness Committee (EPC). He is also a volunteer deputy sheriff with the Sheriff's Department where he has achieved the distinction of being a pistol expert. Within the Sheriff's Department, he is a member of the SWAT team as a tactical physician and a member of the Search and Rescue team as a High Angle Rope Rescue Technician. The opinions expressed by the author are his alone and do not represent the Nellie Gail Homeowner's Association, the EPC, or any specific law enforcement agency. Additionally, the contents of this article are for informational purposes only and should not be construed to be complete or comprehensive for the reader's individual security and protection needs.