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B. R. - Subdivisions
Sherwood Forest forms its own security force
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By MARK LAMBERT
Advocate staff writer *MA 10/12/85*

While there is talk around Baton Rouge of government's hiring of private businesses to pick up garbage and trash, at least one neighborhood is taking the theory a step further.

Since July, the Sherwood Forest Citizens Association has hired off-duty East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's deputies to watch over their homes, and

officials in the association say their approach is working.

"We want to let all the bad guys in Baton Rouge know that we've had it with being victims of crime," said Diane Smith, chairwoman of the neighborhood watch program in the Sherwood Forest area. "I've been burglarized four times, and, personally, I just got fed up with it."

The civic association contacted Capt. Ronny Brouillette with the

neighborhood watch program. Association President Elliott W. Atkinson Jr. said Brouillette explained the program to the members, and a security patrol was born.

Crime in Baton Rouge has risen 26 percent in one year while the fiscal problems of the city-parish have prevented the police department from hiring new officers and buying new equipment. Atkinson said those problems, coupled with the growing

boundaries of the Sherwood Forest area, convinced homeowners to form their own security force.

"The city-parish has put the police and fire protection on the bottom of its priorities," Atkinson said. "It's absolutely ludicrous. So what are we to do? Sit and yell and scream about government? In the meantime, our

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Security

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homes were being burglarized."

Statistics show, and police admit, that crime is no longer confined to "pocket" areas of the city. Police Chief Wayne Rogillio recently said that sections of Baton Rouge that were virtually crime-free 10 years ago are now among the hardest hit.

"Security patrol" may conjure up images of one or two grey-haired ex-cops putting around a neighborhood in a beat-up jalopy, but the Sherwood Forest Citizens Association decided to make a real commitment to fighting crime.

"Landscaping homes used to be our biggest problem," Atkinson said, referring to motorists who would drive through yards, tearing up lawns. "Now we have deputies on patrol with full arrest powers. The deputy reports to four different section leaders and gets his assignment. If we have burglary problems in a specific area, we'll assign the deputy to keep an eye on that area."

Section leaders in the neighborhood watch program use a computer to keep up with what areas in the subdivision are being victimized the most. Association members receive crime data from the City Police Department, and the information is fed into the association's computer. Homeowners, through clip-out cards in newsletters and telephone calls, provide additional information on burglaries, vandalisms and suspicious activity, and that information is also put into the computer.

Lee Knight is in charge of the association's "computer analysis

4,000 audition

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Minuscule parts were enough to draw more than 4,000 University of Wisconsin students to audition for 400 roles in "Back to School," a Rodney Dangerfield movie to be filmed on campus this fall.

division."

"We started using the computer based on the information from the city police," Knight said. "We extract data for the Sherwood Forest area, and are able to narrow down the problem spots in our area. We've begun to add to that information about speeding, dog problems — we're trying to get an idea of when and where the incidents are occurring and get rid of the problem."

Knight said he doesn't envision the association's efforts in crime prevention ever replacing the job of police.

"My concept is that this is a supplement," he said. "I could never see this patrol handling investigations and doing regular police work. That scares the stew out of me, quite frankly."

But Atkinson said the association was forced to hire the off-duty deputies because the city cannot afford to concentrate its efforts on any one area of the city.

"The city police, practically speaking, doesn't have the capability to do this," Atkinson said. "This area has grown from 28 subdivisions in 1978 to 77 subdivisions in 1985. We have over 3,200 homes, and people are just sick and tired of being burglarized."

Smith said she believes the program is working.

"We started this in July, and the number of calls we've gotten since then has decreased dramatically," Smith said. "We think that's because crime is down in this area."

Atkinson said that, although not every area in Baton Rouge can afford to hire off-duty deputies or police, "Sherwood Forest just happens to have the resources to do this."

"I guess that's one of the unfortunate things about this," he said. "We decided we could do this on our own, and we did it. Some areas of the city can't, but that's the way it's always been on earth."