



73 Saint Pauls Avenue, Staten Island, New York 10301-3217
www.tompkinsville.org | info@tompkinsville.org | 413-375-4432

Neighbors unite to protect, preserve community

New Neighborhood Watch group recruiting block watchers to combat quality-of-life crimes

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By TEVAH PLATT

ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

STATEN ISLAND, NY -- TOMPKINSVILLE -- Residents of Tompkinsville have had enough. A group of them is forming a Neighborhood Watch group to deter and combat local crime, unbearably loud parties and other quality-of-life problems.

Michael Schnall and Anthony Abbate, the young leaders of this grass-roots initiative, say that vandalism, out-of-hand parties, street fights, under-age drinking and ill-kept homes owned by absentee landlords have become serious problems for the citizens of Tompkinsville.

In forming the Neighborhood Watch, their goals are to create a visible presence in the community, to recruit "block watchers" to work with the North Shore's 120th Precinct, and to collaborate with area civic groups to make Van Duzer Street, Hannah Street, Victory Boulevard, Bay Street and surrounding thoroughfares safer.

Schnall and Abbate announced the initiative at a Community Board 1 area meeting on Tuesday night at Walker Park, Livingston.

About 15 neighbors have signed on since the founders began reaching out to neighbors with e-mails and flyers.

"We've lived on St. Pauls for 21 years, and in the last five, we've seen a change in the community," said Nancy Biggs, one such recruit at the Community Board meeting. "We see Section 8 overcrowding, commercial business opening in residential zones and problems with noise and disrespect. I'd like to be a part of this effort because they're doing great grass-roots stuff."

Another member of the group who requested anonymity said persistent calls to 3-1-1 and the local police precinct had little to no impact on wild summer parties where he witnessed under-age drinking, apparent drug dealings and music pumped through huge outdoor public-address systems that shook his sleeping toddler's windows late at night.

Another anonymous member has conducted private surveillance in recent months, discretely video-taping ugly beatings and street brawls near Van Duzer and Hannah streets.



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"There is a host of reasons why the area should be undergoing a renaissance," said Schnall of the neighborhood that recently saw renovations completed at Tompkinsville Park.

The neighborhood stands to gain additional funding for street-scape improvements; the Staten Island Downtown Council, for instance, is applying for a New York Main Street grant that could bring up to \$265,000 in matching funds to brighten up businesses on Victory Boulevard between Bay Street and Cebra Avenue.

At Tuesday's meeting, executive director of the Downtown Council Kamillah Hanks lauded the Tompkinsville Neighborhood Watch initiative. "We need to help each other out," she said.

The new group's Web site includes news, resource links and comments from the community about local crime and reportedly dumpier locales, including the Taco Bell parking lot and the Tompkinsville train station.

Tevah Platt covers the North and East Shores for the Advance. She may be reached at platt@siadvance.com.

Don't complain: Get involved

To join the Tompkinsville Neighborhood Watch or learn more about it, visit the group's Web site at www.tompkinsville.weebly.com.