

On Saturday, August 26th, a meeting was convened at a cabin on Old Strawberry Road with Deputy Ashley from the Tuolumne County Sheriff's Office. The meeting was held because of a rash of burglaries that had occurred the week before. About 30 Strawberry residents attended and the following notes were taken in order to share with SPOA members.

What Happened?

There were six cabins on Old Strawberry Road burglarized and vandalized in the week prior to the meeting. The cabins were all located just down from the old school site. Because cabin owners may frequent their cabins only on weekends, it is impossible to determine the exact day of the crimes. Some of the stolen items had been stacked in the forest area behind the cabins with the presumed intent that the criminals would return later to pick them up. Some items were recovered. A Fresno gang symbol was spray painted in one of the cabins; law enforcement were unsure if this was done by actual gang members or as a diversionary tactic by the criminals. Evidence at the impacted cabins was collected by the sheriff's office and is currently being examined for DNA by a national crime lab. Results from these tests can take weeks or months depending upon the work load of the national laboratory.

What Cabin Owners Can Do

Deputy Ashley offered tips and ideas for those gathered:

- Owners should maintain a complete inventory, including specific descriptions, of the contents of their cabin.
- Photographing or video is an ideal method for recording the contents of your cabin and should be stored off-site for later reference.
- Place identifying numbers on items, ideal for this task is driver's license number, a birthdate, anything you can easily remember at a later date.
- Install motion activated lights on the exterior of your cabin.

- Put internal lights on timers with varying on-and-off times day and night.
- Know your neighbor's names and contact information.
- Always contact the Sheriff's Office to report any suspicious vehicles or persons in the neighborhood. Do not be concerned with reporting something that may turn out to be a false alarm, they don't mind, they would rather get the call.
- Write down or utilize your phone to photograph license plates of suspicious vehicles or persons. Cell phones are ideal for this task.
- Install motion activated video systems around your cabin. Many newer and less expensive systems have come on the market making this option more affordable and practical.
- Make sure your cabin street number (address) is clearly marked on the outside of your residence so responding deputies or fire personnel can easily find you (think of finding your place on a dark night).
- Consider the installation of an alarm system. Mountain Alarm Company and ADP were both mentioned.
- Watch out what is going on in the neighborhood, wave to people, let anyone you encounter know that you saw them.

What You Should Know

- Response time from the sheriff's office can be long given the responding deputy might be coming from Sonora.
- Generally there are four deputies on patrol during each shift so the department is stretched thin.
- Because of recent state ballot initiatives, the Tuolumne County Jail is now charged with keeping some inmates for multiple years (the previous limit was one year) which results in crowded conditions and may mean non-violent criminals are released pending their arraignment for a crime.

- In 2016 there was a burglary associated with temporary forest workers in the area but there is no evidence that the current crimes are related.
- Cabin owners should make no assumptions about the age or ethnicity of a suspicious person, these burglaries may be committed by young OR older individuals, there's no known profile.
- The rangers at Pinecrest do have two law enforcement officers as part of their team. These rangers would only respond to a life and death emergency in the area (as a back-up to the Tuolumne County SO) and are not assigned to patrol any community surrounding the Pinecrest forest and campgrounds.

Action Items and Plans

- There was a request by residents and endorsed by Deputy Ashley that Del Oro consider placing a gate at the bottom of the water tower access road, the road off Old Strawberry Road at the top of Summerhill.
- Those attending would like a central clearing house for more real-time information so cabin owners can post details of crimes, suspicious people, or just neighborly information (not necessarily negative).
- The formation of a formal Neighborhood Watch program where cabin owners are supplied a map of the streets, perhaps first names of cabin owners, a phone number; This is desired to facilitate active communication amongst neighbors and reduce the potential for property crimes.