

Fighting back

Residents join forces to save area

By Ed Severson
The Arizona Daily Star

In 1993, the violence of the '90s touched Terra Del Sol.

One day in May, a random shot from a car passing through the eastside neighborhood killed 68-year-old Betty Williams, who was sitting at a kitchen table playing cards at a friend's home.

"That really woke people up," said Fran Chiasson, one of many Terra Del Sol residents who were spurred by Williams' tragedy to take steps to keep their quiet neighborhood from gradually sliding into decay.

"I think we all had the choice of rolling over and playing dead and hiding behind locked doors, or saying, 'Not in my neighborhood,'" said Noelle McCright, Chiasson's neighbor and fellow activist.

McCright, who is president of the Terra Del Sol Neighborhood Association, and Chiasson, a vice president, said that until the Tucson woman's death, residents felt that big-city problems had passed them by.

A square mile, bounded on the west by Wilmot Road, on the east by Kolb Road, on the north by 22nd Street and on the south by Golf Links Road, Terra Del Sol is an older neighborhood, begun in the '50s.

Many of those who live there are the original owners of the homes.

"It's close to 85- or 90-percent owner-occupied," said Chiasson.

Many residents are second-generation, and there are a few third-generation residents as well.

Both outraged and alarmed by Williams' death, some 200 Terra Del Sol residents met in June that year at the 22nd Street Baptist Church to discuss what could be done to make their neighborhood safer.

They agreed that traffic through the

neighborhood had to be slowed down and that neighborhood watches had to be formed.

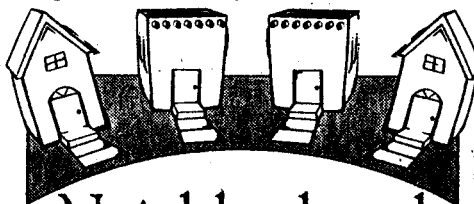
That same month, as a show of solidarity, about 80 neighbors got together at Terra Del Sol Park.

"We said, 'Bring some cookies to share,'" recalled Chiasson.

"It was to show that that was going to be our park," said McCright. "We were making our presence known."

By fall, individual streets were forming neighborhood watch groups.

The following April, there was another picnic at the park where residents



Neighborhoods

signed petitions to have "speed humps" - which are lower, wider and easier to drive over than speed bumps - installed on the streets.

"People would call and say, 'We need them,'" said Chiasson.

Residents on each street carried petitions to get the speed humps put in.

"It's just like street lights or sidewalks," Chiasson said, referring to the process.

"The City Council approves the formation of an improvement district."

Their efforts paid off. Terra Del Sol got City Council approval, and 44 speed humps were installed last April.

"The speed humps slow everybody down," Chiasson said.

"I think they have been very successful on our street," said neighborhood resident, Florence Ashley.

"I think people don't like to go over

See NEIGHBORS, Page 2D

Neighbors

Continued from Page 1D

these humps, so they'll find other routes."

In the meantime, some 20 or 25 residents have been meeting once a month for about a year to pick up trash and paint out graffiti in the Alamo Wash, which runs through the neighborhood.

"People are getting reacquainted," McCright noted.

"I enjoy doing it," said Ashley, who has lived in her house for 38 years.

"We have doughnuts and coffee before we start, and it's a real joy to drive through the neighborhood and not see trash all over."

Ashley is also a leader of her Neighborhood Watch group.

Each month, she gets a flier loaded with tips on how people can protect their homes and themselves. She makes sure that each house on her block gets one.

Residents have heeded many of the suggestions, such as trimming back the shrubbery from the houses.

"It helps to be able to look across the street at your neighbor's house and see the whole front, especially the doors and windows," she said.

Like others, Ashley feels that it was Williams' death that galvanized the neighborhood into action.

Although a reward has been offered, the killer has not been found.

"You think that it can't happen in your neighborhood, but it sure can," Ashley said.

Nobody claims that Terra Del Sol has solved all of its problems.

But throughout the area, residents are taking responsibility for their neighborhood.

Some have adopted small sections of it to make it a better place for everyone.

"My wife, Norma, and I live on the street behind Palo Verde High School, and we do a mile-and-a-half circuit three or four times a week to police it up," said Dick Sertich.

As he sees it, if trash is allowed to accumulate, people are more likely to add to the pile. So he and his wife, Norma, carry a bag along with them to make sure that doesn't happen in the area that they've adopted.

"There's a little pride when we take our walk, look back and see that whole stretch is just clean as a whistle," he said.

Meanwhile, Chiasson and McCright are looking for someone in Terra Del Sol who will spearhead VIP (Volunteers In Prevention), a program where residents drive through the neighborhood in the evenings and act as the "eyes and ears" of the police.

"They (the police) supply you with a cellular phone, and when you see something that's not the way it should be, you patch into 911," said McCright.

McCright and Chiasson are likely to find someone to head the project because residents no longer take it for granted that their neighborhood will automatically be the safe and secure place they had believed it to be.

"There's been a big change," Chiasson said.

It is a change that many admit was brought about by the tragedy of one person, Betty Williams.

"I often think that there should be a memorial to her, because, in her death, she has done so much," Chiasson said.

StarNet news link

The original story on Betty Williams' slaying is on the StarNet archives.

'Speed humps' help slow traffic in Terra Del Sol

The 44 "speed humps" installed in Terra Del Sol last April have already significantly slowed neighborhood traffic.

"What's happening in most cities in the United States is that the inner city is being ravaged by speeding traffic," said Vincent Catalano, project engineer for the city's Neighborhood Traffic Management Program.

The traffic-control program is designed specifically to protect the environment and quality of life in Tucson neighborhoods.

Traffic control can involve the use of such methods as signs, signals, traffic circles and speed humps. No one method is effective in controlling traffic in all situations.

Speed humps are nationally accepted for use on residential streets.

A speed hump, with its 12-foot width and 4-inch height, is much less jarring to cross in a vehicle than the 4- to 6-inch-high speed bumps used in shopping centers and apartment complexes.

Catalano said that out of the approximately 1,200 homes in Terra Del Sol, 12 residents phoned to complain about the humps.

Neighborhoods that want to have speed humps installed must have the approval of 60 per cent of the residents.

Installation of the humps is paid for by the residents, either through the improvement district process or through contributions.

Those who want more information about the Neighborhood Traffic Management Program, can call Vincent Catalano at 791-4259.