

2006 Vehicle Theft Award of Merit

Category 1 (1-250 Officers) Winner: Bellevue, Washington, Police Department, of which James E. Montgomery is the Chief

In 2005, this city of 117,000 persons with 176 sworn officers combined community interaction and education with aggressive and regional enforcement efforts to reduce the incidence of auto theft.

Educational Initiatives:

- Officers answered during National Night Out™ citizens' questions and distributed to over 2,000 persons more than 500 combination portable car alarms/"smart" steering wheel locks valued in excess of \$25,000.00.
- Community Station Officers continued the Vehicle Crimes Reduction Project, encouraging business owners to post signs and to improve landscaping and lighting, conducting informational meetings with apartment residents and businesspeople, distributing—in conjunction with security officers—informational fliers, increasing police presence at identified auto theft locations, and focusing on recidivists.
- Those who attended Bellevue's 10-week Citizens' Academy heard presentations from auto theft detectives, as well as from Special Enforcement Team (SET) officers.
- Media releases highlighted incidents of auto theft and related arrests, and provided theft-prevention tips to enlist greater citizen involvement. The Crime Prevention Unit prepared and distributed "A Guide to Home and Personal Security," which included information on auto theft prevention.

Enforcement Initiatives:

- SET, initiated in 2003, targeted the "top 10" offenders and their associates, conducted considerable surveillance, and had its fingerprint evidence promptly processed by Bellevue's automated fingerprint identification system (AFIS).
- Officers were assigned to investigate auto theft and to coordinate more closely their efforts with those of the prosecutor's office, so better quality cases that yielded higher pretrial bonds and longer sentences upon conviction could be built.
- Covert surveillance cameras were installed, and a bait car was utilized.
- The Crime Analysis Unit developed bulletins based on reported crimes and recoveries; noted identified trends, hotspots, and suspect information; and made available electronic pin maps showing the locations where vehicles were both stolen and recovered.
- Patrol and bike officers concentrated during uncommitted patrol time on locations of frequent thefts and processed for latent prints recovered stolen vehicles.

The Bellevue Police Department reduced auto thefts 6.7 percent in 2005 over 2004 (from 608 in 2004 to 567 in 2005) and increased arrests by 58.8% (from 34 in 2004 to 54 in 2005).

Category 2 (251-1,000 Officers) Winner: Colorado Springs, Colorado, Police Department, of which Luis Velez is the Chief

The Police Department initiated both educational and enforcement strategies that reduced vehicle theft 16 percent in 2005 over 2004, after it had increased 54 percent between 2001 over 2004. The Department's efforts included:

- Partnering with the El Paso County Sheriff's Department, the Colorado State Patrol, the Colorado Department of Revenue, and the National Crime Insurance Bureau (NCIB) to inspect the business records and licenses of auto parts dealers and body shops. Two stolen vehicles, a vehicle with an altered vehicle identification number (VIN), and 30 blank vehicle titles have been detected.
- Working with Drive Smart of Colorado Springs to launch "Lock It and Pocket," which addressed the fact that more than one-third of the vehicles stolen had had their keys left in them, preparing Community Alerts for its Web site, providing interviews to the City's three local news stations, developing a radio jingle, and placing brochures on the windshields of unattended vehicles with keys in their ignitions.
- After determining that a relatively small number of individuals were responsible for the vast majority of auto thefts, officers began targeting repeat offenders and debriefing arrestees to reduce vehicle thefts and obtain leads to solve other crimes. As a part of plea-agreements where no additional charges would be filed, but testimony would be required, officers interviewed—in cooperation with the El Paso County District Attorney's Office—persons about other crimes of which they were aware; six motor vehicle thefts and four burglaries have been cleared, and one vehicle has been recovered.
- Recovering stolen vehicles and effecting arrests by checking the registration plate numbers of vehicles in the parking lots of hotels/motels.

Category 3 (1,001+ Officers) Winner: Reduce Auto Theft in Texas (RATT), of which Michelle Lanham is the Program Manager

RATT has been funded since its inception in 1995 by grants from the Texas Automobile Theft Prevention Authority (ATPA) and serves as the central distribution point for all ATPA literature and promotional items. Its sole focus is to reduce vehicle crimes via public awareness and prevention education:

- It produced and presents to law enforcement agencies the four-hour "Auto Theft Awareness and Prevention" course approved by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education.
- It created in 1998 and distributes the "RATT High School Curriculum," which emphasizes how young, first-time drivers can protect their vehicles and that their peers are often among the most-arrested vehicle theft offenders. Law enforcement agencies and Education Service Centers actually teach the course; 5,314 copies of the student workbook and 359 copies of the teacher's guide were dispensed in 2005.
- It commenced in 1997 the "RATT VIN Etching Program" that VIN-etched 373 vehicles in 2005.

- Its myriad efforts no doubt contributed to the 4.4 percent statewide reduction in vehicle theft in 2004 compared to 2003.

Category 4 (Multi-agency task forces) Winner: Arizona Vehicle Theft Task Force, of which Lieutenant Robert L. Ticer is the Commander

The Arizona Vehicle Theft Task Force is a multi-agency, cross-jurisdictional entity operating with representatives from 15 agencies and in seven of Arizona's 15 counties and successfully has combined enforcement and training with public relations since its inception in 1997. Its significant activities include:

- Serving as the lead agency in conjunction with Southern Arizona Border Enforcement Details, which recorded in 2005, 19 arrests, 33 recovered stolen vehicles, 157 undocumented aliens detained, and two significant drug seizures
- Conducting computer checks of the registration plate numbers of vehicles in the parking lots of hotels/motels and awaiting the return of suspects when "hits" are received
- Utilizing LoJack's Stolen Vehicle Recovery System, as well as OnStar by GM's alerts, to recover stolen vehicles before they can cross the international border into Mexico
- Inspecting impound lots for stolen vehicles, and investigating insurance fraud
- Supporting Arizona legislation to make using or possessing a deadly weapon while possessing a stolen vehicle a felony, and human smuggling while using a stolen vehicle a class 2 felony
- Assisting other law enforcement agencies; participating in various public awareness and community education programs; conducting 34 law enforcement training seminars involving more than 850 Arizonan and Mexican officers; designing a theft prevention brochure, which has been translated into Spanish; and VIN-etching;

All of the Task Force's efforts in 2005 over 2004 led to four percent more total recoveries, 16 percent more altered/switched VINs, ten percent more felony arrests, and 24 percent more assists to other agencies.