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SIXTY CENTS

Fanwood Community Policing Alliance Reports Borough's Participation in National Night Out

By MEREDITH MANNINO

Specially written for The Times

The Fanwood Community Policing Alliance (CPA) invites all residents to participate in a unique crime/ drug prevention event known as National Night Out. National Night Out (NNO) is a 22-year-old crime awareness/prevention event sponsored by the National Association of Town Watch (NATW), and will be celebrated nationwide in early August. According to NATW, America's Night Out Against Crime is designed to heighten crime and drug prevention awareness, generate support for, and participation in, local anti-crime programs, and strengthen neighborhood spirit and police/community partnerships. At last week's CPA meeting, Fanwood Police Sergeant Tom Jedic discussed some main themes of the activities and informational sessions that will comprise Fanwood's recognition of NNO. "The whole idea behind the National Night Out is to foster a community watch and teach people to observe and report," he explained.

According to Sergeant Jedic, an eyewitness account of a perpetrator's appearance or suspicious activity can greatly assist cops in apprehending criminals. Tattoos, eye color, height, jewelry—these are things that people should pay attention to because such specific information can help identify criminals and scam artists. "The little details make a big difference," Sergeant Jedic said. To further illustrate his point, Sergeant Jedic tested the small group in attendance at the CPA meeting. He briefly left the room and returned dressed in slightly different clothes, minus a bracelet and band-aid he was wearing moments before. It was amazing how those little details made such a difference the physical description of Sergeant Jedic, who was acting as a villain. Another theme he discussed was the importance of residents educating themselves about which utility companies service the borough. He said this is key in helping to prevent residents from falling prey to criminals posing as utility workers. Similar attention to detail is necessary in preventing home improvement plan scams from robbing local neighborhoods. Sergeant Jedic explained that dilapidated equipment and out-of-state license plates are often signs of con artists posing as contractors. More details regarding Fanwood's recognition of National Night Out will be discussed at the next CPA meeting, which will be held on Wednesday, June 22 at the Forest Road Park Building at 7:30 p.m.. All meetings are held at this location on the fourth Wednesday of every month.

Sergeant Jedic pointed out that outreach programs are often implemented as a result of residents expressing their concerns at CPA meetings. For example, the Fanwood Police Department, in partnership with the Quick Chek of Fanwood, has launched a free program called "Operation Vial File" for borough residents. This project, which was inspired by a discussion at a CPA meeting, distributes at no cost, an emergency information packet for residents to store vital medical information. Police or rescue personnel, in the event of a medical call at the resident's home, can retrieve the vials from the home's refrigerator in an easy to locate spot.

The Quick Chek of Fanwood has allowed the Fanwood PD to set up a safety booth in the store, located on North Avenue. The booth has free handouts and pamphlets on a variety of safety topics, including substance abuse, gun safety, and domestic violence. "It's a sort of anonymous resource center," Sergeant Jedic said. He expressed his gratitude for the Quick Chek's cooperation, and also acknowledged the willingness of the community in general to help and contribute. "I've found through my CPA work that there are always people who want to help," Sergeant Jedic said.

In the beginning of June, the CPA is offering free Community Emergency Response Training (CERT). The eight-week course is divided into two-hour blocks. CERT is a national organization that teaches citizens life saving skills in the event of a fire or other crisis. The Fanwood CERT is an organized team that is available to assist first responder services. Residents can complete the CERT training with no obligation to become a CERT team member.

For more information about the CPA, visit www.fanwoodcpa.org.

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