



## The Star-Ledger

### **E. Orange sees big drop in crime**

**Reduction reflects high-tech strategy and community allies, officials say**

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Street surveillance cameras linked with a sophisticated acoustic gunshot detection sensor system are part of a high-tech strategy in East Orange that is continuing to produce dramatic crime reduction results, police officials said yesterday.

"Our efforts have resulted in high dividends," Police Director Jose Cordero said, as he detailed how fewer and fewer incidents of murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft are occurring in the city.

"Our city not only became safer, a lot safer in 2006, but double-digit reductions were recorded in all major crime categories," Cordero said.

Thanks to ongoing criminal intelligence gathering and analyzing efforts, the total number of crimes in East Orange -- between 2003 and 2006 -- fell from 7,249 to 3,179, and that represents a 56 percent across the board reduction, Cordero said.

"We are policing our streets in unique ways, the byproduct of which, is an emerging law enforcement model that works," Cordero said.

Among the strategies helping to make a difference, Cordero said, are weekly police computer statistics strategy sessions that review crime-fighting efforts, 13 hidden police surveillance cameras around the city, an improved gunshot sensor detection system, and specially selected residents participating in a computer-assisted block watch effort called Virtual Community Patrol.

One of the latest crime-fighting tools -- the installation of a dashboard detection system, laptop-like computer monitors/video surveillance screens in all police supervisor patrol cars -- also is responsible for helping reduce crime, Cordero said.

A patrol supervisor can be parked at one downtown location, observe what's going on there, and turn to his or her dashboard monitor and get a live video surveillance feed of what's happening elsewhere, perhaps seven or eight blocks away, Deputy Police Chief Kevin Morgan explained.

"Three years ago, we embarked on a mission to make East Orange safe for its residents, visitors and businesses," said the Bronx-born Cordero, a retired New York City Police inspector who used to be the civilian head of the police department in the Boston suburb of Newton, Mass. "Since then, we have relentlessly engaged in, and accomplished some ambitious goals."

Those goals have included assessing all public safety issues in the city, reorganizing and refocusing the police force, developing and implementing cutting-edge police strategies, deploying state-of-the-art technologies and reducing crime to unprecedented levels, Cordero said.

Since mid-2005, the police department's acoustic gunshot detection sensors have been synchronized with video cameras strategically placed around the city. Once the sensors detect a gunshot, the camera lenses

automatically aim in the direction of the gunshot sound and record everything.

Right now, "we're the only city in the nation to have both working, side by side," Cordero said of that technology. The city plans to add five more cameras in the coming days.

All of those concepts, and others developed in East Orange, collectively are allowing the police to anticipate what criminals will do next and intervene to prevent crimes, rather than reacting to what criminals do, Cordero said.

By and large, the police department's crime reduction efforts, the publicized arrests of criminal suspects, means more and more people up to no good are being educated to the reality "that it is a bad idea to commit crimes in East Orange," Cordero said.

Last year, the police dismantled six Bloods gang sects and one Crips gang sect operating in the city, and "we are moving forward with other investigations to rid our streets of their harmful presence," Cordero said.

"East Orange is making believers of even the most skeptical observers," Cordero said. "It seems that we are capturing public imagination. A number of cities experiencing problems similar to those that we have successfully dealt with, are coming to East Orange to find out what we are doing and how."

Law enforcement officials in Buffalo, N.Y., as well as in Berks County, Pennsylvania, have enlisted the East Orange Police Department's help in employing those and similar techniques in their respective locales, Cordero said.

East Orange first began to record crime reductions shortly after Cordero came there in July 2004.

He is credited with working with the uniformed personnel of the 250-member police force, recommending changes, and launching a series of new crime analyses, crime-solving and crime-deterrent activities.

The police agency's Virtual Community Patrol program established last year allows specially selected people to use their home computers to access a special Web site, pull up a police department-linked video monitoring system, and instantly alert police about criminal complaints and even visually pinpoint problem locales.

Mayor Robert Bowser praised the police department's ongoing crime-reduction efforts.

"It's a new day in our great city, and I'm proud of all the efforts of the East Orange Police Department," the mayor said. "They have the full support of my administration and the governing body."

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