

Item #1 Woodley Avenue Park

Last month, I reported my experience in witnessing more than 125 bikers illegally gathered on a Saturday at Woodley Avenue Park. There were vendors taking up the north parking lot and bikers plugging up Woodley Avenue and popping wheelies in the middle of traffic – at least 15 by my count in the span of about ten minutes. It was loud, unsafe and scary for anyone out for a nice Saturday in the park. After calling 911 twice on my cellphone, I was told that it had been turned over to the Park Rangers as the park was their jurisdiction. In my subsequent call to the Park Rangers office, I was informed that the bikers had a permit and that Van Nuys PD also was aware of this permit. Two days later, my follow-up call to Park & Rec. proved otherwise as I discovered that no usage permit had been issued through that or any other department for a gathering of a motorcycle circus at Woodley Avenue Park.

I also reported that I would be contacting L.A. City council members Tony Cardenas and Greig Smith and asking for 15 minutes to meet with each one of them in their district offices to discuss this issue. While I never received official responses to either request, I did informally bring up the issue at Greig Smith's bi-monthly meeting of neighborhood councils where I was told by Ron Berkowitz, the head of Park and Rec for the Valley, that he was aware of my email and that, because of my complaint, Park and Rec has now changed the way they put permit events on the calendar and their method of notifying law enforcement. I told him that was great, but I'm not sure that it is the whole problem. There is a bigger issue and it is one of response time.

In the last month, I have learned the following, so feel free to correct me if I'm wrong;

- Park Rangers are staffed at about one half strength due to budget constraints;

- Park Rangers have been asked to respond to gang activity against park-goers at Woodley Avenue Park and have either taken hours to respond or have not responded at all to complaints;
- The City of Los Angeles is moving all Park Rangers, library guards and others over to General Services where they will be trained, armed, and more flexible and able to respond to calls;
- Mayor Villaraigosa is seeking funding for 1,000 more LAPD over the next four years. It looks like the Park Rangers will remain at current underfunded levels;
- CHP receives 911 cell calls and forwards those calls to the law enforcement group that has jurisdiction. In the case of the bikers on the street and at the park, the CHP contacted the rangers to respond – it was the Rangers jurisdiction – the Rangers responded with one young unarmed Park Ranger in a white mini-pickup who was already misinformed about the permit and who sat, parked, watching all the activity. I have no idea what the hell he was supposed to do. He probably felt the same way. Confronting 125 bikers ain't easy even for Batman. His response, the ranger, not Batman, after watching for a while was to tell the bikers over his loudspeaker to stop blocking traffic on Woodley. Then he left, having turned the issue over to LAPD;
- According to today's watch commander for the Rangers, on an average day, there are four to five rangers on duty to cover more than 400 parks in the City of Los Angeles. In the Valley, we have one ranger who covers 120 parks. The other three to four can serve as backup.

After my contact and conversations with CHP, I ultimately believe the disconnect lies with the beleaguered Park Rangers. There aren't enough of them to respond in a timely manner to a 911 call from a cell phone to the CHP. But the parks are the Rangers' jurisdiction. Each law enforcement agency has its own jurisdiction for investigation of crimes.

Now, I don't have a full grasp of what the city is trying to do with General Services, but I believe that arming library guards is not really going to help those in the parks who encounter trouble. What is a library guard

supposed to do when faced with 125 bikers? Pull a gun and “shush” them? Are our libraries even open on Saturdays and Sundays?

Late today, I received a call from another contact who told me that, according to the higher ups at the Rangers, there already is a “strong agreement” between Rangers and LAPD. Also, admittedly, according to this higher up, some calls fall into the “gray area” where they simply die at the Rangers Office. Given that each ranger has more than a hundred parks to oversee, I’m not surprised.

The solution to safer parks within our city could be an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the Rangers, LAPD and the neighborhood councils that, if the Rangers cannot immediately dispatch one of their own to the scene of a complaint or criminal activity within a park, the call will be immediately forwarded by Park Rangers to LAPD to secure the scene until – don’t forget the “until” – Park Rangers can arrive to take over. I understand through our own Officer Ron Carter that LAPD does receive park calls also, but it’s apparent that we need something in writing that compels the Rangers to ask for assistance sooner than later.

This way, the homeless man who made the 911 cell call after being severely beaten by gang members at Woodley Avenue Park won’t have to wait five hours for a ranger to arrive. This way, the family that was accosted by gang members at Woodley Avenue Park will actually have their call responded to. This way, the city can actually monitor the response time of the Rangers. There aren’t enough of them.

Until then, just like I said last month, please stay out of Woodley Avenue Park. It is too dangerous, there is no guarantee of safety, and you will be putting yourself and your loved ones at risk.

Next week, I hope to have a meeting with Tony Cardenas to review this and a few other issues within our district.

Item #2 Illegal Vendor Sweep

A vendor sweep was carried out on Tuesday, November 8th on Cohasset and Bassett Streets. According to Officer Ron Carter, two of the main offenders at Cohasset and Bassett Street were cited, along with five produce trucks, two ice-cream vendors and two fruit carts. Building & Safety, Health Department and Housing accompanied the SLOs on this sweep. He also said that with the cooler weather, we will likely not have a need for another sweep until the spring. However, they will not let up. Officer Carter is putting together a flyer for children to take home to their parents regarding the unsafe food items, along with a slide-show to present at schools for parents to view. Special thanks to Officer Carter for his above and beyond the call of duty commitment to the West Van Nuys/Lake Balboa district.

Item #3 Home Depot

I can't figure out what kind of a neighbor Home Depot really is. In Burbank, in order to gain a lease, they promised to build a day laborer shelter at their new facility to keep the guys off the streets begging for work while at the Home Depot in our district, that shelter has been shut down for three years. Not a good neighbor in my book. However, word has it that, after having hemmed and hawed for years, our in-district Home Depot, with the help of a local charity, may reopen the shelter very soon. We'll see.

Item #4 Gaynor Street Sniffers

Getting the secondary aeration tanks covered or retrofitted at the Tillman plant is going to take some real grassroots activism. After the Gaynor Street Sniffer tour, I have become more conscious and have now smelt that smell on my own street and down as far as Kester and the 101. That musty smell we all smell when the marine layer is pressing or the air is still is something that many of us have gotten used to over the years. But with homes averaging \$500,000 in our area, and high density housing being built along Vanowen, don't we owe

it to ourselves and our neighbors to get that last tank taken care of? Doesn't City Sanitation owe us that quality of life? I have heard the argument that "people should know they're moving into an area where there's a sewage treatment plant and if they don't like it, they shouldn't buy a home there." Fair enough. So, who's going to force the real estate agents to say, "Excuse me, but before you sign that loan for half a million that's going to cost you \$1.5 million over the next thirty years, I just need to tell you that, sometimes, the air doesn't smell so great at your house. As a matter of fact, it smells like a really bad day at the beach and you never know when it's going to hit you. Enjoy your new home!"

It's not the engineers at the Tillman's fault, nor the plant manager's. The Tillman was not built for odor control. Over the years, everything has had to be retrofitted. Also, promises were made to our stakeholders and not kept in the past regarding controlling those odors and now with the budget issues the city is dealing with, we have to start making some real noise to get any consideration. I hope that the neighborhood council will see fit to support the Gaynor Street Sniffers as they campaign to raise awareness and improve our district's quality of life. To accomplish this, we will also need to use our WVNLCBNC website to track and assist complaints about the air quality from Tillman. I hope one of our able webmaster-type volunteers will step up to help us.

Item #5 Shopping Cart Hell

If you call 311 for shopping cart removal, they will give you a number to call. You then call that number, they take your information, and within a day or two, the cart is whisked away. Unless you are me. And my neighbor. And the cart is from Kmart.

After espousing the beauty and usefulness of 311 to my neighbor Kevin for removing a shopping cart left on his front lawn I was shocked that after a week and three calls, it still wasn't getting picked up. Then I stepped in and began calling 311 and then the recommended company and giving the same info. Another few days passed with no result. Time to investigate further.

So I called 311 again to find out “why.” “Why” do you use a company that is unresponsive? 311 told me they have nothing to do with it. The company – which, by the way, is a “referred” service and not contracted by the city – that does the pickups is the responsible party. So I call the company to ask “why.” They tell me that they provide this service from San Diego to Las Vegas to Fresno. I was impressed, but why wasn’t this one cart on Densmore Avenue being picked up after almost two weeks? Do they just have one truck working the Fresno to Las Vegas to San Diego route? The lady asked me where this cart was. Again, I gave her the location and she found it right away on her computer screen and told me that they don’t pick up Kmart carts. Kmart does. Well, that makes sense. I asked her if, instead of just taking the information, they could have at least contacted us back to tell us to call Kmart. She said they don’t do that. Yeah, thanks, I figured that one out myself.

So I called two different local Kmart stores and talked to the general managers at each. Both said they’d take care of it because carts cost about \$80 bucks apiece and that’s a lot of money. Nothing happened for another two days. The cart had now been there so long at the front of my neighbor’s house, I was thinking about nominating it for Business Stakeholder Representative at our next neighborhood council meeting.

One final plea to the North Hollywood store brought results. My orangey-red BSR candidate was gone. The “referred” company reflected very poorly on the other good services provided by the city and my neighbor felt disrespected and deflated about city services.

In our microwave society, we have become used to the idea of “press a button and get a result.” 311 is pitched to the citizenry as something that accomplishes that ideal, but, sadly, in the case of shopping cart pickup, it does not. And as witnessed, we end up with wasted time and no recourse toward result.

Councilmember Greig Smith told me that they have a pilot program coming into District 12 that attacks the “hot spots” of shopping carts. Ideally, where two or more carts gather, a team will zoom in and pick them up on a regular route. But his description didn’t and wouldn’t cover my neighbor’s situation. What I’d prefer would be

a pilot program that puts all the Kmart's and Ralph's and Big Lots folks on notice – it's called "Pick up your cart in 48 hours or we're recycling it."

Here's my pilot program and instead of thirteen, it only takes two calls; Angelenos call 311 to report an abandoned cart, if it's not picked up in 48 hours by the owner, give us another call here at 311 and City Sanitation will pick it up and either recycle it or release it back to them at the cost of retrieval plus 10%.

Just like the Orange Line, if something works, people will use it. Empowerment of our communities means offering services that are simple, sensible and useable. Shopping cart retrieval through the city is only partly useful and Councilmember Smith's Big Brother approach, while admirable, still doesn't cover the need of an individual in our district to simply report something and get a reasonable, timely response.