

Longmont Gangs: A Closer Look.

Question and Answer for Sunday Times-Call

1. What are Longmont's gangs fighting over exactly? If it's territory, which gangs lay claim to which parts of the city now, and which parts are they still trying to win?

Our gang unit officers believe our gangs are fighting over mostly differences in each other. They describe the issues more on the order of what middle school kids would fight over. There are not fights to gain or take over territory. Sometimes they fight over people of the opposite sex, often times it is a fight over how one gang member looked at another gang member. Loyalty to the gang can be fickle. One day a person may be a member of one gang and the next day a member of a rival gang.

2. In an atmosphere in which eradication of gangs is probably not possible, how does mediation/conflict resolution help? What outcome do you envision from it?

I do not believe it is impossible to eliminate gangs in Longmont, particularly given the loose structure of gangs that exist. In fact, it is the only goal our community should have regarding gangs. But there are certain realities we will need to confront very differently in order to reach that goal.

The police department could arrest and jail every single gang member in this community. In fact, we have arrested many of our gang members. We have arrested several of our gang members multiple times. However, and unfortunately, the social conditions that assisted in the development of gangs would continue to exist as fertile ground to grow and replace every single gang member we arrested. Case in point, a few years ago we arrested 29 members of one particular gang and for the most part dismantled that gang. After a few years, the gang members we arrested were out of jail and back in Longmont. In some cases incarceration assisted in the further development of them as gang members. They are now in the process of rebuilding their gang with the addition of younger, more impressionable youth.

The police can hold crime to minimal levels given adequate resources, but deep comprehensive revitalization of neighborhoods will be necessary to eliminate social conditions that precipitate gang activity that currently exists. In partnership with police intervention and apprehension, our community will need to heavily invest in evidence proven and research-based programs such as early care and education, restorative justice practices, mentoring programs for gang wannabes and support mechanisms for at-risk families.

3. How much will the beefed-up police response to escalating gang violence cost taxpayers? And how long will it last?

It is clear to us that the community expects the police department to respond appropriately to the recent gang violence, but in the process of shifting resources to this effort we were robbing Peter to pay Paul. Specialized Units such as our Traffic Unit and our Beat Support Team are being utilized to respond to the current gang issue. In addition, we have temporarily removed a full shift of patrol officers to respond to the current gang issue. We will eventually scale back our current

efforts, but we believe that our sustained response to gangs and the potential for gang violence will need to remain significant for the foreseeable future. Having said that, we know that we will not be able to sustain our current response and efforts without additional resources.

Response to the gang activity by the police department for the first ten days cost the department approximately \$31,000.

4. After the recent gang violence, more than a dozen gang members were arrested on outstanding warrants. Why were these individuals not arrested before?

This question, at some level, presumes the police have not been monitoring gang activity and have not been active in invoking the criminal justice system regarding gangs. As stated earlier, in the past the Longmont Police Department arrested many gang members. Many of these members were arrested multiple times. We have arrested first, second, and third generations of gang members from the same family. In some cases family members belong to the same gang and in some cases family members are associated with rival gangs.

As it relates specifically to this question, on any given day we have on file approximately 3,000 outstanding active warrants. When resources will allow, we will conduct warrant sweeps. On days when we conduct these sweeps, these efforts place a tremendous strain on our police department and on the Boulder County Jail. A one day sweep can result in the arrest of up to 30 people.

The recent, intense focus on gang members in our community has presented an opportunity for us to contact more gang members, more frequently than we normally do. As a result, we have been able to contact gang members who have active warrants. Incidentally, most of these warrants were as a result of failing to appear in court on an initial charge for which they were previously arrested. When this happens the presiding judge will issue a warrant for their arrest. As you can well imagine there are also gang members who have warrants and are doing their best not to be contacted by the police. By the way, since our more focused efforts began we have arrested and or summonsed 35 gang members for varying offenses.

5. You have stressed community policing. How do recent events, including the gang-related homicide, affect the idea that a resident can approach another resident and ask him or her to stop a certain behavior?

I have and will continue to stress community policing. A basic tenet of community policing involves strong integrated neighborhoods working in partnership with the police department. The definition of community policing means that both the police and the community are responsible for community safety.

Unfortunately, we still respond to calls for service in which the victim and neighbors do not know each other, even though they have lived together in the neighborhood for many years.

This phenomenon was present long before the events of the last several weeks and makes a neighborhood vulnerable to crime and disorder. By the way, this issue is not reflective of social-economics – we see it in wealthy and not-so-wealthy neighborhoods.

I have been encouraged by many people who attended the community meeting and who have indicated they want to form a Neighborhood Watch or Neighborhood Group. Unfortunately, it takes a perceived crisis to stimulate this kind of action.

6. What resources -- other than calling 911 -- can the police department offer to neighborhoods to cut down on gang activity?

The police department encourages and will assist in the forming of a Neighborhood Watch or Neighborhood Group. We have long stated that a strong neighborhood is the best way to crime-proof and gang-proof any neighborhood.

The police and city government have a number of resources available to assist:

- The Neighborhood Watch Program at the Longmont Police Department was designed to be the eyes and every neighbor on the block. Call the Police Programs Coordinator at 303.774.4440 for more information.
- Neighborhood Group meetings. These groups are organized to build a communication link between the city and neighborhood groups to address needs and concerns of residents as well as forming partnerships to improve the quality of life in Longmont. Call Jon Clarke at 303.651.8721 for more information.
- Know your beat officers. Longmont has 14 beats with an assigned sergeant and several commissioned officers. Talk to your beat officers about challenges you believe your neighborhood confronts. Call 303.651.8555 to locate your beat or on the city website at <http://www.ci.longmont.co.us/police/department/beatmap.htm>.
- Assemble a group of 15 or more people and schedule a presentation by the Gang Task Force. Let them educate your club/group. Call 303.651.8536.
- Remove graffiti as quickly as possible. Graffiti can be seen as a status symbol – removing it quickly eliminates this stance. Call GEAR at 303.774.GEAR (4327).
- Do you have a child you believe is involved in gang activity? Call GRIP (Gang Reduction and Intervention Program) for resource assistance at 303.651.8580.
- Need educational materials on gangs? Call 303.774.4440. This information may be picked up or mailed.

7. Are there danger zones in Longmont where people shouldn't walk around? Any particular time of day?

We do not believe that there are any danger zones in our community or any particular times of day where people should be concerned. As always, residents should take normal safety precautions wherever you are or wherever you travel in Longmont.

8. How many gangs are there in Longmont and what are their names?

In the last year the Longmont Police Department identified 13 gangs. A gang, as defined by Colorado Revised Statutes (CRS 23-33.5.415.13), means a group of three or more individuals with a common interest, bond or activity characterized by criminal or delinquent conduct.

Those 13 gangs consist of the following: Surenos (SUR) and East Side Latinos (ESL) and the Nortenos. We have also made contact with the Westside Outlaws, Pretty Boy Gangsters, LTC (Longtown Creepers), Only Mexican Clique (OMC), Guanajuato (GTO), San Juan, Puro Vato Locos, and Westside Locos, Insane Clown Posse (ICP) and the Brotherhood. In the past year,

the department dismantled the Brotherhood for their involvement in methamphetamine distribution, kidnapping and torturing their victims. In addition, the Longmont Police Department has also identified members of Asian gangs and right-wing extremists and outlaw motorcycle gangs. While these gangs may not necessarily currently be active in our community, the Longmont Police Department is monitoring their activity.

Here's what we know about the nature of gangs in Longmont. We know that gang members can be transient moving from one place to another, we know that the majority of gang members are legally in the United States. We know that gang members vacillate from active to inactive. We know that loyalty to a gang can be fickle. We know that people from rival gangs marry. We also know that just because a member belongs to a gang does not mean that the member is embedded. We also recognize that gangs thrive on the media attention they receive.

If you are interested in additional gang related information you should visit the City of Longmont police website. This site contains more specific information about gangs www.ci.longmont.co.us/police.

9. How is the Longmont Police Department coordinating efforts with other jurisdictions and organization to identify gang members and stop gang activity?

The Longmont Police Department continues to build new partnerships and tap into old partnerships as we work with gang suppression.

On the police side, we are exchanging intelligence information and working closely with many surrounding agencies including those in Boulder County, the Denver Metro Area, and agencies within the federal government. We are tapping into local agencies with specific expertise, and have on several occasions, utilized staff well versed in gang members and their affiliations. These partnerships are essential.

We have and will continue to work closely with many non-profit and other city agencies as well as the school district, the faith community, and other agencies in Boulder County. We are collaborating closely with those agencies in Longmont in prevention and education efforts. We have applied and received several grants to assist in collaborative efforts.

10. How do you know who is in a gang?

Per state law the following criteria is used to determine if an individual is considered to have gang membership. This criteria is used on a case-by case basis and may be considered alone or in combination.

1. An individual admits membership in a gang and displays knowledge of the gang activities;
2. When a reliable informant or other law enforcement agency identifies an individual as a gang member;
3. When an informant of previously untested reliability identifies an individual as a gang member and this information is corroborated by other independent information based on these designated standards;
4. Tattoos with gang names, slogans, and other insignias are present on a suspected gang member (this criterion by itself is sufficient to classify an individual as a gang member);

5. Articles of clothing, accessories or colors that are consistently used as an indicator of gang identification or activity
6. Graffiti on an individuals clothing, personal articles or on the individuals person;
7. When there are strong indicators that an individual has close social relationships with a gang rather than professional relationships with a gang, but does not exactly fit the above criterion, they shall be identified as a gang associate.

We strongly encourage you to access the police website www.ci.longmont.co.us/police/prevention/gang.htm or contact GRIP (Gang Reduction and Intervention Program) at 303.651.8850 for more information

11. How are graffiti and gangs related?

There are two types of graffiti: gang graffiti and tagging graffiti. Graffiti has been called the "Newspaper of the Streets." Each is distinctive from the other.

- **Gang Graffiti** is used to designate gang affiliation and gang members and often times tells what is going on with the gang.
- **Tagging Graffiti** is used for gaining "Fame" with others who are into tagging. The tagging usually shows the "Tag Name" or moniker and sometimes the name of the Tagging Crew they belong to.

Street gang members put up graffiti to increase their visibility. Gang graffiti is usually much more primitive and sometimes more easily read than graffiti done by taggers. Gang graffiti may show alliances between gangs, mark the scene of a crime, or commemorate the death of a beloved "homie" (with slogans such as "In memory of" or "RIP"). Cross-outs of individual letters or of rival gang names are common. This means that Individual letters are crossed-out when that letter is in a rival gang's name.

12. You've already responded to complaints that police do nothing when notified of graffiti, but please tell us again what that response is and how police and residents can work together on this issue?

There are two types of calls for graffiti assistance. The first type is a graffiti call in-progress meaning it is occurring as a resident is watching. The second type is graffiti call in which there are no witnesses.

Each and every request made for an in-progress graffiti call is tracked through the Longmont Communications Center. If the graffiti call is in-progress, officers will be sent as quickly as possible.

Residents play a critical role in being the eyes and ears for the community. Many of those recently caught defacing property have been arrested as a result of a call from the community. Residents are most effective when calling 9-1-1 for a graffiti in-progress call when they can provide a plate number, description of the vehicle (color, make/model, and year) and number of occupants, what the occupants are wearing, approximate age as well as their gender. Do not approach those involved in what you believe is illegal activity.

For those instances in which the graffiti is not in-progress the City of Longmont's Code Enforcement provides oversight. To report graffiti not in-progress you can call 303.774-GEAR (4327). Calls will be responded to Monday thru Friday within 48 hours.

Last month, city council met to look at modifications to the graffiti ordinance. These modifications will include the hiring of a staff member whose primary responsibility is graffiti removal. I would invite people to call me if they believe they have received less than adequate service (303.651.8533).

13. In crime tracking, does the police department flag every case that could be connected to gang activity?

Yes, we have a policy in place which requires our officers to report any type of gang activity to our Gang Unit.

14. Do police officers note whether gang members are citizens, legal immigrants or illegal immigrants? Can you estimate the percentage of gang members who are illegal immigrants?

If an officer arrests anyone, including a gang member, who happens to be an illegal immigrant we will ensure that ICE (Immigration Customs Enforcement) is notified. There is now a law in the State of Colorado that requires the police to notify ICE whenever we arrest anyone who is an illegal immigrant.

The vast majority of gang members in Longmont are citizens of the United States. Most of the gang members were born in the area or in Longmont itself. Incidentally, those involved in the recent gang violence were also US Citizens.

15. How has the job description of school resource officers changed in recent weeks?

School Resource Officers (SRO's) have been in our schools for almost 10 years. They have prevented many crimes from occurring and are in a constant state of collecting information regarding future crime.

SRO's assist in the prevention and control of crime, delinquency, truancy and disorder on the school campuses. They conduct and/or assist in the investigation of offenses. They provide presentations and educational resources and as requested by the school's staff provides instructional resources for classroom presentations. They enforce federal and state statutes and municipal ordinances as well as appear in court and assist in the prosecution and other judicial processes. SRO's assist campus monitors with enforcement in the parking lots and other grounds of the schools as well as attend school related functions such as school dances, sporting events as regular duty hours. And lastly they contribute to what is hoped to be a positive police-school-community relations effort, especially those efforts which relate to students and parents.

The job description of SRO's has not changed; however, what they focus on changes periodically. At Christmas time officers they tend to focus on suicide prevention education while in May officers are focused on prom and alcohol prevention/education response. These officers have always been in the business of identifying risk factors. Right now SRO's are providing gang

enforcement, counseling and intervention. They are providing referrals to GRIP for parents who have students believed to be gang members; they are tracking down the source of any school safety threats. They are gathering intelligence about gang activity and membership; they are working to provide resources that make these students susceptible to this type of behavior.

16. What is the ethnic make-up of the two gangs involved in the recent violence? To what degree is the police department targeting or profiling Hispanics in order to curb gang activity such as that recently seen?

The ethnic make-up of the two gangs in the recent violence is Latino. We know of no Anglos or Caucasians in either group. Officers are not targeting or profiling Hispanics during gang suppression efforts. We are focusing our efforts on those we believe who are involved in gangs. Officers are provided specific gang-related background information to deal with those that we believe have gang affiliations. It is, and has always been, the police department's policy to target the criminal behavior and not the race of any one person.