

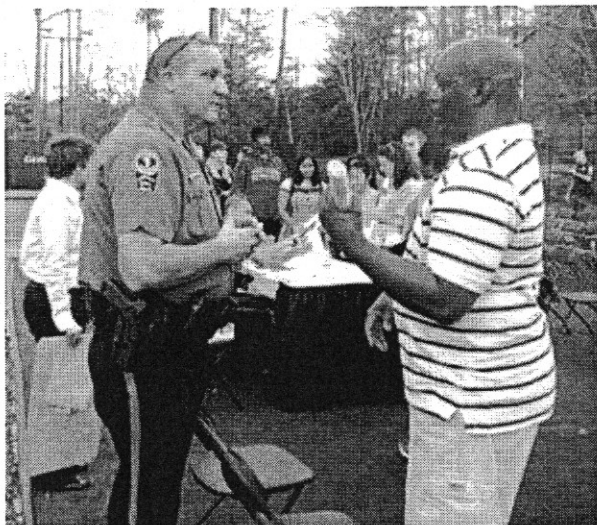
Police recognize first crime-free complex

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DULUTH -- Since his family's move from Toledo two years ago, Clifford Jones said he has felt relatively safe in his apartment at The Arbors at Breckinridge.

But the former military policeman said a new Crime Free Multi-Family Housing program from the Gwinnett County Police Department is making things even better.

"It's much needed," he said Saturday after officers recognized his Duluth-area complex as the first to complete the series of safety checks.

"For a while, the apartments had been neglected," Officer Humberto Garcia said of complexes where officers frequently had to respond to gang and drug calls and other incidents. Unveiling a sign to notify people of the distinction, he added, "You guys are going to be taking back your neighborhood. ... Anyone who drives into the community will know that you guys are engaged and committed to keeping crime out of your neighborhood."

According to Garcia, who coordinated the multi-family program as part of the community policing initiative, a Mesa, Ariz., police officer developed the program in 1992. The three phases include training of complex staff on safety issues and an assessment of issues such as landscaping and lighting that could detract from crime.

As part of the final phase, officers will go door to door to meet residents, give them phone numbers and encourage them to report issues that could develop.

"It behooves you to know who your neighbor is and what goes on around you," Garcia said, adding that officers are trying to break the habit of transient apartment-dwellers who want to keep to themselves.

"You are a community. You have to look after each other," said Officer Eric Rooks, the crime prevention coordinator.

Property Manager Deborah Huff thanked the more than 50 residents who attended Saturday's ceremony for taking an active part in the community.

"We do want to provide a secure environment for you to live in," Huff said.