

STATEWIDE CRIMESTOPPERS AWARENESS PROGRAM

Got a Burleson Kickoff

Crimestoppers has a new weapon — signs at Texas highway rest areas advertising Crimestopper's statewide hotline number (800-252-8477). Travelers can call the number and pass on tips and information regarding a criminal or drug crime. All callers remain anonymous.

It was an idea born and bred in Johnson County.

Johnson County Crimestoppers board of directors, based here, developed the concept, and the first sign was erected at the I-35 Southbound rest stop (exit 33) in Burleson on April 25. The Texas Department of Transportation is installing the signs at all 201 road side rest stops across the state.

The object was to expand awareness and effectiveness of the Crimestoppers program. Although each participating community has a local number, out-of-town travellers in general were not aware of the programs or the telephone numbers. The Johnson County Crimestoppers board wanted to change that by providing a single, statewide Crimestoppers hotline telephone number and other state-wide emergency numbers at highway rest areas.

"Encouraging people to report information about crimes is a major component of solving and preventing crimes," said State Representative Arlene Wohlgemuth, who worked with the Governor's office and the Texas Department of Transportation to spearhead the effort. "The Johnson County Crimestoppers have taken the lead not only in our area, but also statewide. I was pleased to be able to assist them in obtaining awareness signs in every state rest area."

The Texas Department of Public Safety also helped sponsor the project.

"This awareness program has been a long time coming," said Captain Dorrita Hottel of the Burleson Police Department. "The board came up with the idea to make Crimestoppers more accessible to the public three years ago. Thanks to a lot of hard work and determination, the concept is now a reality."

Why did the board choose rest areas as their target site? According to Hottel, hundreds of people pass through rest areas every day. "The signs have been placed in high visibility areas within the rest stops," Hottel explained. "They're near drinking fountains and restroom entrances so people who use the facilities are sure to see them."

Has the program worked? Hottel said that since the signs went up calls in Burleson have increased tremendously.

"Something has inspired people to start calling, and I don't think it's a coincidence that it happened right after those signs went up," she noted.

Hottel said Crimestoppers is a program that works well and that's why the fight to put this awareness program into place was so important. Since January of this year, Crimestoppers has helped recover \$83,000 worth of narcotics and four arrests have been made for crimes that would have otherwise gone unsolved.

"Crimestoppers in itself does not solve crimes," said Hottel. "But, the information people provide us through the hotline gives our detectives tips and leads in cases where they have nothing else to go on."

People who phone in tips that lead to the arrest and indictment of a suspect could receive a reward of up to \$1,000 as determined by the Crimestoppers board.

City and state officials, and community members gathered at the site to kick off the new program. Among the attendees were Representative Wohlgemuth and David Kobos, executive director of Texas State Crime Stoppers. Also present were officials from the Texas Department of Transportation and Texas Department of Public Safety. ★



Installation of the first Crimestoppers highway rest area sign drew a crowd of local and state officials. left-right: Bill Stribling, Crimestoppers board member; Martin Griffith, Johnson County Sheriff; Chris Britton, Chief of Staff for State Rep. Wohlgemuth; Otis Lane, Crimestoppers board member; State Representative Arlene Wohlgemuth; Byron Black, mayor pro tem of Burleson, and Crimestoppers board member; Ruth Ann Hill, Crimestoppers board member.