

Crime down for fourth straight year in Pittsburg

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Despite an uptick in homicides, 2009 was the fourth consecutive year that Pittsburg saw a drop in total reported crime.

According to police data, violent crime reports fell 26.3 percent in 2009 compared with 2008 — the fifth time in six years the number of such offenses declined.

Nonviolent property crime dropped 11 percent, and overall the city's Part I crime, or the composite of violent and property crime, was down 12.2 percent.

The East Contra Costa city had eight homicides in 2009 compared with three in 2008. Pittsburg had eight homicides in both 2006 and 2007.

The number of aggravated assaults fell by 22, to 46; and robberies fell to 94 after reaching 159 in 2007. Reported rapes fell for the sixth straight year.

Nonviolent property crimes declined from 2008 to 2009 in all but one category, burglaries, which rose by 54, to 493. Auto thefts fell by 55, to 522; larcenies fell by 255, to 1,082; and arsons dropped from 8 to 5.

Continued community involvement has been instrumental in Pittsburg's downward crime trend, police Chief Aaron Baker said.

"We can have all the best programs and tactics in the world, but it means nothing if the community doesn't get involved," he said.

Residential calls about suspicious activity help police know where to deploy officers, he said.

Other measures implemented the past few years also have helped, Baker said, including security cameras around town, a business watch program, and working

with other city departments on code enforcement to root out troubled spots.

City leaders praised the work by the Police Department in pursuing suspicious activity and following up on all crimes. Pittsburg police respond to every call and write detailed reports, Baker said.

Councilman Will Casey, a longtime police chief in San Francisco and Pittsburg, said he's "never seen it done so well. They don't just sit and wait for the next call. They're watching people," he said. "Crime going down is by plan. It's not by accident."

For many years, Pittsburg has had an unfortunate image of being a higher crime area, though "what people think is very different from reality," Vice Mayor Michael Kee said.

Jennifer Johnson, a lifelong Pittsburg resident, said she doesn't hear a lot about the big crimes "that make the news" anymore, but she is aware of smaller problems like tagging, gangs and stolen items from cars and homes.

"I do see how some things have gotten better, but some of the little things may get overlooked," Johnson, 26, said.

Chris Lanzafame, a Pittsburg resident and owner of family-owned Lanzafame Furniture Co. downtown, added that crime isn't a topic of conversation like before.

Though he keeps his eyes peeled as a merchant, "things are getting better," he said.

Though the trend is promising, police say there are still some problem areas. They must continue to stay on top of trends and adjust accordingly, Baker said.