

## POLICE URGE OAK PARKERS TO BLOW A WHISTLE AND HELP STOP A CRIME

When Oak Park Police officers begin handing out free whistles to CTA train passengers, they will be combining the low-tech tool of a loud, shrill sound with the high-tech speed of a cell phone to help fight crime. The program, based on a similar police initiative popular in the 1980s, is rooted in the simple idea of citizens looking out for each other. Called *Blow a Whistle, Stop a Crime*, the goal, police say, is to give individuals another tool for letting everyone within ear shot know that someone needs help and to call 9-1-1.

"Preventing crime is not about just having police officers everywhere, all the time," said Oak Park Police Chief Rick C. Tanksley. "The most important tools of crime prevention are alert citizens who are willing to get involved. And that's what the whistle program is all about – alert citizens getting involved. The whistle is just another tool, an addition to a cell phone that citizens can have at their disposal when the need arises."

Individuals don't need to wear the whistle around their neck or always have it in their hand, according to police. They just need to keep it handy, such as in one's purse or on one's keychain and then pull it out when they think they might be about to encounter a risky situation. In fact, individuals don't even have to carry a whistle to get involved in the program – they only have to call 9-1-1 immediately if they hear a whistle being blown. "Most of the crime in Oak Park involves bicycle thefts and garage burglaries. But such statistics mean little if you are the victim of a robbery or a snatch-and-run," Tanksley said. "It is these types of crimes we believe the whistle program can help prevent."

Community Bank of Oak Park River Forest is sponsoring the program by helping underwrite the cost of more than 3,000 whistles and related crime-prevention educational materials. The program would not have been possible without the bank's participation, police say. "With the help of a local business, we are able to give citizens a low-tech, potentially high-impact way to call for help," Tanksley said. "We could not have this program without Community Bank's willingness to be our partner. Clearly, they take the community part of their name seriously. And we're glad they do."

While CTA train riders are the first to get free whistles, police hope to distribute them to others as well – at least while supplies last. Police say they also are open to other local businesses that might want to help support the program.

For more information on the *Blow a Whistle, Stop a Crime* program, call 708.386.3800 or e-mail [police@oak-park.us](mailto:police@oak-park.us).

