

Village's 'no tolerance' campaign begins this week after surge of offenses in 2012

Responding to a rise in park-related crimes last year, Grafton police are launching a campaign this spring to crack down on offenders.

The campaign, which has been coordinated with the village's Parks and Recreation Department, calls for an increase in park patrols, surveillance cameras and other law-enforcement steps, Police Chief Charles Wenten said.

"We're trying to do an informational blitz and let everyone know that some of the behavior we've been seeing in our parks will not be tolerated," Wenten said.

"Last spring and summer, we have a lot of fights, swearing, drugs, loud noise and intimidating behavior in parks. That's got to change.

"When people are doing things that threaten the safety and enjoyment of other people, we have to do something."

In announcing a campaign that begins Friday, May 10, police said the crackdown was initiated after a variety of 2012 park incidents that included explosives, fights, narcotics, underage alcohol violations, unsafe driving, property damage and littering.

"The intensity and frequency of these issues was greater than in years past," a village news release stated.

"The police department has also received complaints of loud, inappropriate music being played to the extent that it disrupted other patrons of the park and groups of people engaging in disruptive behavior, including loud, vulgar language and littering."

As part of a new "no-tolerance policy," Wenten said, anyone cited or arrested for a park-related offense will not be allowed back on any public property that is under the jurisdiction of the Parks and Recreation Department until the citation has been paid or the charge adjudicated. Such property includes parks, playgrounds, riverwalks, historical areas and parking lots connected to those venues.

Anyone violating the ban will be arrested for trespassing, Wenten said.

Wenten said the all-inclusive nature of the campaign underscores the seriousness of the offenses and a determined response by the village. An increased police presence in parks will include the use of plain-clothes officers, he noted.

"Near the end of last summer, we had a fight go on between two groups that went from Lime Kiln Park to Lions Park. They simply went from one place to another and continued to cause

Police crackdown targets park crimes

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problems,” Wenten said.

“We were getting calls and the parks department was getting complaints. We knew that something more than usual had to be done.”

Wenten said most of the incidents have occurred in the most popular parks — Lime Kiln, Veterans Memorial, Centennial and Lions — but have also been reported at other locations.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said the police crackdown has the support of local officials, including Parks and Recreation Director John Safstrom. The Public Safety Commission was not asked to make a recommendation on the campaign, which is considered a police initiative.

“The village staff has many tools to put in place for increased law enforcement in parks,” Hofland said. “In 2013, a more comprehensive approach will be used.”

Wenten said police are encouraging residents to take an active role in the campaign by reporting illegal and suspicious activity in parks.

“We want the participation of the community so we can more effectively address the concerns of citizens,” he said.

“Everyone is welcome in parks, and we are going to make sure that parks are a safe place to go.”