SMILE you're on camera

Burglars, bandits target of new 'eyes' in Garfield Ridge

By Tim Hadac

The northwest corner of Garfield Ridge, long considered one of the most quiet and safe parts of the Southwest Side—and even the entire city—may soon receive an influx of cameras designed to keep it that way.

City officials plan to install police cameras at 53rd and Harlem, 51st and Central and possibly other locations, it was announced at the September meeting of the Garfield Ridge Neighborhood Watch.

"Those two spots—53rd and Harlem and 51st and Central—are critical access points to our neighborhood," noted GRNW President Al Cacciottolo. "Criminals looking to break into garages and houses—or commit other crimes—use those two locations to get in and out quickly, because they are both so close to the expressway."

Cacciottolo said that 23rd Ward Ald. Silvana Tabares is working with police to get the cameras installed at Harlem Avenue, and that she is reaching out to 14th Ward Ald. Edward M. Burke about getting the same at 51st and Central.

As technology advances and news of burglaries and robberies spread more broadly and quickly than ever—thanks to social media platforms—more people than ever in Garfield Ridge, like city neighborhoods and suburbs everywhere, are turning to cameras to help thwart criminals.

Local Facebook groups abound with home video surveillance footage of criminals and other suspicious individuals. Often, the people captured on video are shown breaking into homes, garages or vehicles. Sometimes they are stealing packages off porches or committing acts of vandalism; and at other times, they may just be dog owners not picking up after their pets.

The increased interest, at least in Garfield Ridge, may be fueled by two recent and still unsolved robberies of homeowners—both reported exclusively last month by the Southwest News-Herald.

• A 61-year-old Garfield Ridge grandmother was robbed at gunpoint as she stood on the front porch of her home in the 5200 block of South Newland at 12:33 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 11.

The gunman snatched away her laptop computer and Coach purse; and when she began screaming, the bandit pulled a pistol and fired a shot at her. It missed and hit a window.

In a post on social media, the victim said she "was returning from the hospital after being with my son and daughter-in-law for the birth of my granddaughter."

Police recovered a shell casing on the victim's front lawn.

She said the because of the horrifying experience, "A very happy event in my life turned tragic…and now my life will never be the same."

• A 35-year-old Garfield Ridge woman was robbed at gunpoint in her garage near 51st and Newcastle, at about 2:20 a.m. Thursday, Aug. 9.

The victim said she had just pulled her car into the garage, but that the overhead door would not close.

When she got out of her car to investigate and step outside the garage, a man suddenly appeared and thrust a gun into her stomach. He pushed her back into the garage and ordered her to surrender her purse and other valuables, which she did.

Shortly after police arrived, they found the victim's purse with credit cards inside. Missing were a wedding and engagement ring and about $200 cash.

The victim also turned to Facebook to share her experience and said the harrowing ordeal left her unable to sleep or be alone in the house.



A Chicago Police surveillance camera mounted high on a pole. Such cameras can and sometimes are monitored by authorities, both at the City's 911 Center on the West Side and at CPD's Chicago Lawn (8th) District headquarters at 63rd and Homan. – *Supplied photo*