This *is* their block



TIM HADAC

You may recall the front-page headline from the Aug. 9 edition of the Greater Southwest News-Herald—in which we quoted CPD Sergeant Thomas Gorman as he and other police officers stood in solidarity with law-abiding citizens fighting what they said was gang intimidation in the 3800 block of West 57th Place.

In an outdoor roll call held on the street within spitting distance of the two-flat where the reputed gang members live, he assured neighbors that police are "aware of the problem house on this block and aware that the gangbangers are out here and they will not be intimidating you...this is not their block. This is *your* block."

Turns out, he was right.

Last weekend, a U-Haul truck pulled up on the street, and the reputed gang members moved out—much to the delight of the law-abiding homeowners on the block, at least one of whom had planned to sell because of the situation, but now are staying.

You may recall that at the outdoor roll call, police were joined by 23rd Ward Ald. Silvana Tabares, several dozen homeowners from that block and adjoining blocks, Catholic nuns from St. Turibius Parish, a Protestant minister, and representatives from several crime fighting groups like the Garfield Ridge Neighborhood Watch and the Clearing Night Force.

It was an impressive display of Southwest Side unity against crime, and it sent a very clear message to the reputed gang members—a message that was reinforced by stepped-up patrols by Chicago Lawn (8th) District Police.

Did the reputed gang members move because of the pressure, because they knew they were being watched closely? Perhaps, or perhaps not. Can't say for certain.

But I'd bet that's what it was.

Since I started reporting Southwest Side news 35 years ago, I've seen a number of these situations. In recent years, gangbangers moved out of a house they were renting near Normandy Park, and other gangbangers moved out of a house across from Kennedy High School.

In most cases, what caused them to leave was simple pressure by neighbors, by law enforcement and by elected officials. Nothing illegal, nothing unethical, nothing more than letting them know they were being watched and that gangbanging would not be tolerated one bit.

Decades ago, an Eighth District Police commander said at a public meeting that gangbangers are like cockroaches. They thrive in darkness; but if you shine a light on them, they scatter. Seems he was right.

In this situation in West Elsdon, praise must go to Alderman Tabares, who provided the type of grassroots leadership that all elected officials should note and emulate.

Praise also goes to the law-abiding residents of that block and everyone who stood with them.

But more than anything, praise must go to CPD Commander Brian McDermott and the team he leads. Police officers confront danger so the rest of us don't have to. May all of us remember that and appreciate it.

The lesson here is that when good men and women stand shoulder to shoulder for their neighborhood and against crime—and if they do so in unity with police and elected officials—they will win, again and again.

May all of us on the Southwest Side take note of this situation and learn the lesson.