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- Making public safety fun: National Night Out events highlight ties between local first responders, communities

Making public safety fun: National Night Out events highlight ties between local first responders, communities

Paola Baker, Daily Press

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McGruff the Crime Dog and Sparky lead dancers in the Cupic Shuffle during the National Night Out event in Victorville on Tuesday. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

VICTORVILLE — It was another sizzling August day in the High Desert, and Kat Powers and her three boys were looking for something fun to do.

Fortunately for the Victorville family, there was an event that perfectly fit the bill — the annual National Night Out event, held in front of Victorville City Hall this year.

“And it’s right down the street too, so we can walk here,” Powers said, as the boys lined up to get “fingerprinted” by a San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department deputy during Victorville’s event Tuesday evening. “It’s definitely something fun for the kids to do. We’ve come out for a few years now. They like it here.”

National Night Out events highlight first responders around the country — such as law enforcement, firefighters, rescue teams and paramedics — by offering the community a chance to enjoy fun activities in a “block party” type setting.

“It’s a great way to engage with the community,” California Highway Patrol Officer Jose Macias said. He and fellow officers from CHP’s Victorville office were manning a booth along Civic Drive, braving the triple-digit heat.

“It’s hot, but everyone’s having fun out here,” Macias said with a grin.

Despite the heat, several residents came out to Civic Drive and similar events held in Hesperia, Apple Valley, and Helendale to enjoy music, games, and snacks. In Victorville, kids were encouraged to get signatures from first responders at every booth to enter a raffle at the end of the event.

“Quick, what’s the number for 911?” a **San Bernardino County Fire** Department firefighter asked a group of children gathered around the booth, all eager to answer. “OK, now who knows about ‘Stop, Drop, and Roll?’ Want me to show you?”

These types of interactions were on full display at just about every booth in the event. Residents danced along with McGruff the Crime Dog, got cuddles from service dogs, ate hot dogs and shaved ice all while learning valuable information on keeping a community safe.

Booths featured details on forming Neighborhood Watch programs, how to volunteer at the Red Cross, tips on creating a home emergency kit, and several other helpful programs.

National Night Out events also afford first responders from different agencies a chance to get to know each other — something that's not always possible when busy fighting crime, as Macias showed while he chatted with a Sheriff's deputy.

“We typically don't get together too much unless something's going on, so this is a good way for us to catch up as well,” Macias said. “It's always a fun time.”

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