

Rural crime rates rising

By Krista Conrad
Staff Reporter

Property crime rates are on the rise in the MD of Foothills.

According to a report the Okotoks RCMP presented to MD council on Oct. 21, property crime has risen 25 per cent over last year.

Staff Sergeant Jim Ross said the crime rates are on par with other communities surrounding Calgary, an area that has witnessed significant population growth in the past few years.

"Any time you have a concentrated area with more people, there's a greater chance of property crime," he said.

Ross said the message to rural property owners is the same for those in town – for neighbours to watch out for one another, ensure entrances to property are secure and to lock the doors to vehicles and houses.

He said some rural residents have a sense of security that can make them victims of criminal activity.

"Even out of town, there's always a chance they could become a target for someone," said Ross. "The population may be sparser, but people in rural communities can be victims just as easily as people living in town."

Anyone victimized needs to report the incident, no matter how trivial, and call in information about any suspicious behaviour immediately, he said.

Ross said the rural crime watches play an integral role by sharing information back and forth between different communities.

MD Reeve Larry Spilak is involved with the Okotoks Area Rural Crime Watch Association, which has served the DeWinton area for more than 50 years. He said they work closely with the RCMP and other rural crime watches like the High Country Rural Crime Watch Association out of Priddis.

"When one neighbourhood watch gets notification of something happening, they notify the others," he said. "For instance, if there was a crime in DeWinton, the crime watch there would notify the High Country group and get the message out."

Spilak said the key to the success of a rural crime watch is its membership, and the more residents involved, the more effective the group will be.

For a \$10 annual fee, membership in the Okotoks area crime watch includes a sign to hang on property gate, which Spilak said can be a deterrent for offenders.

Members also receive notification via text or tele-



JIM ROSS

Staff Sergeant
Okotoks RCMP

phone when crime or suspicious activity is reported.

"We think everybody should be part of this organization who lives in the area," said Spilak. "It makes you aware and able to take the proper precautions to protect yourself and it also helps to catch people."

"Oftentimes the notification that goes out includes a vehicle make and model and license plate, and residents can help identify that if they're looking for it out in the community."

Coun. Suzanne Oel is the current president of the High Country Rural Crime Watch Association, which boasts a membership of 522 members.

She said the goal of the crime watch group is to protect people and property by partnering with the RCMP and becoming the detachment's eyes and ears in the community.

"We believe in awareness, communication and education," she said. "We make people more aware so they can be part of the solution."

By equipping people with resources and awareness, Oel said the group has made a difference in the community and hopes it will continue to be effective in protecting area residents and preventing crime.

The group encourages area residents to get to know their neighbours and know the regular traffic on their roads, so they can identify when something is out of the ordinary, she said.

"It's a community approach and that can really make a difference in prevention," said Oel. "It's helpful to have as many people get information as possible, and each one can respond as they wish and so what they wish with it."

A third rural crime watch is currently being formed in the High River area, she said, which will help provide more coverage for the MD.

Those interested in joining the rural crime watches in their area can visit the High Country Rural Crime Watch Association website at www.hcrwa.ca and Okotoks and Area Crime Watch Association at www.oarpcwa.org.

kconrad@okotoks.greatwest.ca

NEW PHASE NOW AVAILABLE

Have it all in MOUNTAINVIEW

MOUNTAIN VIEWS & FAMILY ESTATE LIVING IN OKOTOKS

MountainView was made for families who want it all – pathways, ponds, playgrounds and a character home of enduring value. Add scenic mountain views and a price that fits your lifestyle, and you'll agree – this is life as it was meant to be.











SHOWHOMES OPEN
283 Mountainview Dr.

FRONT ATTACHED GARAGE HOMES

FROM THE

\$430s

UPSCALE RIDGE VIEW HOMES

FROM THE

\$850s

Prices & terms are subject to change without notice.

SHOWHOME HOURS
Monday - Thursday 2-8 PM • Weekends & Holidays Noon-5 PM • Closed Fridays

EXCLUSIVELY BY AWARD-WINNING BUILDERS

EXCEL HOMES

403.982.0040

Sterling HOMES

403.982.0795



MOUNTAINVIEW
IN OKOTOKS

MountainViewOkotoks.com