



DEANNE FITZMAURICE / The Chronicle

Attorney General Jerry Brown tells an East Palo Alto audience that vigilance remains necessary.

## EAST PALO ALTO

# Offensive against crime is 'success'

By John Coté

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A nine-month crackdown on crime in East Palo Alto that blended undercover agents from the state Department of Justice with community activism and street-level diplomacy resulted in what Attorney General Jerry Brown called "real success."

"What we're seeing today is a definite dent in this crime wave," Brown said Tuesday at a press conference at East Palo Alto City Hall to announce lowered crime rates since the state and city began working together in response to a spate of violence starting in late 2006 that left six people dead.

"There's been real success, real progress, but that doesn't mean that crime is over," Brown said, flanked by local police officials, community activists and city leaders. "We have to maintain real vigilance."

The approach in East Palo Alto was comprehensive, and some community leaders called it a model for other crime-ravaged Bay Area cities to follow.

A law enforcement crackdown on drug and gang activity was combined with community groups promoting nonviolence, taking to the streets in marches, and coordinating employment and mentoring programs.

Meanwhile, religious leaders and reformed veterans of street violence brokered truces between

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DOUGLAS FORT, *For Youth By Youth*

feuding factions, sometimes arranging tense meetings on neutral turf in other cities that ended in hugs.

"It falls back to the citizens of East Palo Alto. Period," said Douglas Fort, who helped broker cease-fires as a member of the grassroots nonviolence group For Youth By Youth. "You can bring the whole U.S. Army to East Palo Alto and crack sales are going to continue to happen, violence is going to continue to happen, until momma that owns that house says 'no' to that kid that's selling dope in front of her house."

That type of personal investment is proliferating, and the violence is receding, said Faye McNair-Knox, a member of the community group One East Palo Alto. The group helped organize a "Live in Peace" march in February that drew hundreds and a youth summit in March.

"We are going to become the place where people look and say, 'How did they do it?'" McNair-Knox said.

Police Chief Ronald Davis declared a "crime emergency" and sought help from Brown's office after six people were killed and 67 others were wounded in shootings from November through January. Since then, one person has been killed and 51 people have been wounded by gunfire.

Robberies are down 60 percent from last year, and auto thefts are down 30 percent.

During the crackdown, officers from the state, East Palo Alto and neighboring cities made more

than 225 arrests and 400 parole or probation searches and seized 44 guns. They also confiscated two pounds of crystal meth, 942 grams of cocaine and 133 grams of heroin, police said.

Brown said his agency was willing to replicate its efforts in other cities.

"I haven't gotten the phone call yet," Brown said. "If Oakland or Richmond make the call, you can be sure that I'll be there and do whatever we can."

David Chai, chief of staff for Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums, said he was in discussion with Brown's office on the issue. Brown left Oakland City Hall in January after eight years as mayor.

"We've already considered it," Chai said. "We've had several informal discussions on a broad range of issues in terms of partnerships on public safety. I'm waiting to see about what type of resources are available."

Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin could not be reached for comment.

The keys to replicating East Palo Alto's success are community backing and police coordination between jurisdictions, San Mateo police Chief Susan Manheimer said.

"We are not just arresting our way out of these situations," Manheimer said. "Handcuffs are not the final answer. If they are, we as a society have failed."

E-mail John Coté at [jcote@sfchronicle.com](mailto:jcote@sfchronicle.com).