

# Drop in crime, rise in slayings in E. Palo Alto

■ Officials say statistics seem to be consistent with Bay Area trends

By Jessica  
Bernstein-Wax

MEDIANEWS STAFF

Overall crime and shootings dropped significantly in East Palo Alto in the first quarter of this year, but homicides and domestic violence rose, according to data released this week.

Overall crime dropped 17 percent to 332 reported cases compared with 398 in the same period last year, East Palo Alto Police Department data indicates.

Police recorded a 6 percent increase in assaults, but those committed with a firearm decreased 37 percent in the first quarter. There were three homicides compared with one in the first three months of last year, according to the data.

Burglaries decreased 27 percent, and auto thefts

plummeted 52 percent after spiking in 2008.

"The trend suggests that crime is going down, and that appears to be consistent with the Bay Area trend," said East Palo Alto police Chief Ronald Davis.

While the three homicides were a tragic loss of life, the fact that assaults with a deadly weapon decreased indicates the city has made progress, he added.

"Obviously, one homicide is too many, but ... really what drives the violence number is how many people get shot at or shot," Davis said.

The homicide rate isn't necessarily an accurate measure of violent crime. If the homicide rate remains low despite an increase in shootings, it "is probably getting kept low by Stanford," he said, referring to the lifesaving work done at the Stanford Hospital trauma center.

On Feb. 7, an unidentified man shot and killed 68-year-

old Eduardo Bustos Martinez as he left a children's birthday party at the East Palo Alto Senior Center. In another homicide, Jerry Bottley, 31, died March 17 after two men shot him during a robbery on the 2500 block of Hazelwood Avenue.

And officers found William Sandoval, 32, shot dead in the driveway of a home on the 2200 block of Addison Avenue about 9:30 p.m. on March 20 after a fight about "unwanted guests" broke out at a party nearby.

Davis said those crimes represent a change from other years because they were argument- or drug-related rather than connected with gang activities.

"Looking at the type of homicides, it would appear that gang violence is not up," he said.

Normally, East Palo Alto experiences a surge in shootings at the end of each year rather than in the summer,

Davis said.

There were five homicides in the city of 32,000 in 2008, although one death resulted from injuries sustained in 1997.

Reach Jessica Bernstein-Wax at [jbernstein@daily-newsgroup.com](mailto:jbernstein@daily-newsgroup.com).