

Vision for the future starts with cleanup at home

By Liesel Gowen

More green space. Running tracks. Community-oriented gathering places.

This is the vision city fathers have for the future of South Salt Lake. But first, they say they must crack down on absentee landowners and renters who don't comply with current city ordinances to keep the city clean and safe.

"When we asked the people to pay more taxes, we promised to clean up the city," Councilmember Casey Fitts said. "This is something that has to be done."

In June, the SSL police department restructured the community resource division to focus on crime-free multihousing and crime prevention through environmental design, which includes dealing with any nuisance properties that need attention.

"We are going after all the code violations and we have zero tolerance for them," said Sgt. Brian Stahle, community resources division supervisor. "We will get compliance. We are not afraid to be the bad guy."

Stahle and city officials believe cleaning up dilapidated apartments, enforcing health and building codes, and working with absentee property owners will reduce crime and generate fewer service calls.

"Renters are a great strain on the fabric of our community because they don't have a strong tie to the community," Councilmember Bill Anderson said.

They are also working with the Utah Apartment Association, offering classes to teach property owners the eviction process, as well as their rights and responsibilities.

The council recently strengthened city ordinances to better address crime and the fear of crime as well as foster civic unity.

"Some ordinance violations have been ignored or have been allowed to get away from the property owners," Stahle

said. "Now that we have become aware of them, we are not going to ignore them until they get them taken care of."

In the past, people who were not necessarily causing the problems were penalized; for example, an apartment complex that generated too many service calls in a month were fined, causing rents to be raised due to the added expense, which in turn made renters less likely to call police when there was a problem, Stahle said. The updated ordinance allows police to be more proactive in identifying problems with a particular property on a regular basis and work out resolutions with the manager or owner.

Councilmember Casey Fitts suggested the benefits of using community members to help where they can.

"Not only does it help the police get their work done, but it helps people get back involved with the community, and I think that is a bigger benefit," Fitts said. "It would have people actively involved in cleaning up the community."

As police work to better serve the existing SSL community, the city has several residential development projects underway that are

intended to bring strong, stable residents to South Salt Lake, Mayor Bob Gray said. These include an 85-home project at 3800 South and West Temple; 100 new homes to be built on the unused school district property along 300 East; 25 new homes in a development along State and Main; and plans for more of the same along 2700 South.

Gayle Morten, a newcomer to South Salt Lake, was one of the first residents to buy a condo at Central Pointe, a mixed-use development at 2100 South and Main Street, with 76 condos over retail establishment. She praised South Salt Lake's affordability and convenient location and is enjoying a "simpler life."

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~ Sgt. Brian Stahle, community resources division

Police chief resigns to become undersheriff

By Liesel Gowen

Beau Babka will swap his police chief's badge for the county undersheriff's badge come Jan. 1. After 15 years with the South Salt Lake police force – and less than a year as its chief, it was a decision not made lightly, Babka said.

"It was kind of emotional," he said. "There is a little bit of heartache leaving the people I have come to know so well here."

The offer from newly elected County Sheriff Jim Winder to become his No. 2 man came as a complete surprise, Babka said. But he accepted the position to further his career.

"It just makes sense for someone in my position to move ahead when the opportunity presents itself," Babka said.

The county undersheriff's job is mostly about networking, building relationships and friendships with local officials, according to Babka. He'll support the sheriff and further his cause in every way he can, he said, and will be involved in strengthening, leading and managing Winder's organization.

"I am primarily there for the sheriff," Babka said.

Babka, 43, ran for county sheriff four years ago but was unable to unseat Aaron Kennard. Winder beat Kennard in the November election.

Babka was appointed chief by Mayor Bob Gray on Jan. 13, shortly after Gray took office. Before that, he served as an assistant chief for four years and was captain of administrative services.

Christmas Store unites families, provides gifts for foster youth

The traditional Christmas shopping to buy family gifts was never a tradition for the Sagers family.

With foster children in the home, the Christmas Store has been the more common family activity.

Vicki and Chris, formerly fostered and now adopted by the Sagers family, would meet up with their two younger siblings to pick out free gifts together. Their siblings were being fostered with another family in Tooele.

"It's not like a dollar store. They can actually go in there and find really good stuff," said Shannon Sagers, Vicki and Chris' adopted mother.

The Christmas Store – hosted by Christmas Box International, Salt Lake County Division of Youth Services and the Utah Foster Care Foundation – allows foster youth to pick out gifts for their biological and foster families, something they often don't have the resources to do. Adopted and biological children in the family can shop around, too.

Foster families throughout Salt Lake and Tooele counties are invited to the Christmas Store, which is filled with donations from throughout the community. Each child receives 10 points and can shop throughout the store, picking out different items until their points are used up. Non-point items each child also receives include an outfit – a shirt, pants, pajamas

and socks – toiletries, books, backpacks, school supplies, blankets and stuffed animals.

This year store organizers hope to receive more teenage clothing and other teenage gift items to meet the needs of the older foster youth. Items the store is always short on include teenage clothing, teenage pajamas, DVDs and other gifts for older youth. Gifts for moms and dads are also often lacking.

By gathering more mature youth items, teens like Sagers' now 15-year-old adopted daughter won't worry about not finding the right sizes.

"My Vicki's in a woman's size and they really didn't have a lot for her," she said. "That was kind of hard."

Now that Vicki, 15, and Chris, 13, have officially been adopted, Sagers said they won't be able to "shop" at the store this year. But, that doesn't mean they plan on sitting this year out. Instead, she's looking forward to volunteering.

"I'm excited I get to volunteer and help," she said.

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Salt Lake City



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