

Guest Column by Chief Dennis R. Naylor
Crime Prevention

In this day and age, it is my belief that as an evolved law enforcement agency, our responsibility is not only to respond to crimes but also to work towards reducing future criminal acts through methods of deterrence and community education. The primary ingredient for a crime to occur is an "opportunity." Most crimes are not well-planned and are generally opportunistic in nature. Obviously we can't control when an offender may cross our paths, but we can limit their ability to commit a crime by improving our awareness and practicing sound crime prevention techniques. Criminals prefer to commit crimes which are quick, not easily detected, or ones in which there will be limited resistance offered. This is accomplished by selecting "soft" targets. Examples of soft targets would be unlocked cars containing valuables in plain sight, a person flashing cash as he or she leaves an ATM, a person walking alone late at night, or anything else that screams "easy prey."

The community at large is made up of hard working law-abiding citizens but because there are predators among us, we really need to be alert and harden the targets that criminals would exploit. When you exit your vehicle, lock the doors and roll up the windows. It is never a good idea to leave valuables in sight because they provide temptation to would-be thieves. At home, lock your doors at night and when you are away. Install motion detector lights, and cut away overgrown shrubbery that would hide a person's movement. These simple acts pay big dividends in crime prevention. As you leave an ATM, be aware of who's around you. Quickly place your cash in your pocket and show an image of awareness to your surroundings because again, opportunistic criminals prey on the weak and oblivious. Developing high levels of awareness is so important because it creates the ability to observe the world around you, to orient yourself to a threat, to formulate a decision, and of course to respond and act.

The technologies of smart phones and iPads have made life easier in some ways, but inversely they have caused many people to function in extremely low states of awareness to their environment. We all know people who are so heavily glued to the screen of their phone or iPad that they wouldn't see a freight train coming if it were heading straight towards them. This is obviously not a good means of crime prevention or personal safety. Additionally, we all know someone who uses social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to post everything they're doing along with everywhere they're going. Telling the world where you are lets people also know where you are not. If a person posts that they are visiting family in California, it is easy to assume that they are not at their home in Oneonta, thereby creating an opportunity for a property crime. Even if a person limits their posts to their "friends" the information can easily be shared by a friend to a non-friend and the security offered by privatized settings is completely negated. It's equally important to realize that the people who you may casually "befriend" on Facebook or who follow you on Twitter may in fact be people who have more of an interest in you (or your family) than you do in them, so beware of that. The truth is that social media has helped stalkers commit their crimes more than most people realize.

We in law enforcement do our absolute best to create public safety but no law enforcement agency can guarantee safety for any person. Safety and crime prevention start on an individual level and the best thing that anyone can do to minimize their chances of victimization is to be aware, to limit opportunities as much as possible, and to educate themselves. Please visit our website at www.oneonta.ny.us/police for additional crime prevention strategies or call us with any questions. Be alert and stay safe!

"It is the mission of the Oneonta Police Department to provide professional services with integrity and dedication, to preserve life, to enforce the law, and to work in partnership with the community to enhance the quality of life in the City of Oneonta."

