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Highland Park neighborhood changes for good

By **Sylvina Poole**

Residents and stakeholders in the city's North Side community of Highland Park are grateful for the changes the area has experienced in recent years.

Like some other urban neighborhoods in Richmond, Highland Park was once crime-ridden with few opportunities for employment or business development.

This North Side neighborhood, similar to Jackson Ward, Fulton and Blackwell, experienced both white and otherwise flight and seemed to be abandoned. But the spirit of the people who live and work in Highland Park remained unshaken and intact.

Supporters cite several factors in the positive change. Among them, the group Guardian Angels of Richmond, law enforcement and a handful of community leaders. They note that Highland Park is

experiencing a rebirth, bringing it back to becoming a thriving and safe place to live and work.

"The 'New Highland Park' is what we're calling this amazing transformation," said Jo White, commander of the Richmond Guardian Angels.

For the past 10 weeks, the Richmond Police Department's Sector 411, which includes Highland Park, has been at the top of the list of areas that have experienced crime reduction and number one for the quarter," said Jo White, commander of the Guardian Angels of Richmond.

White attributes most of the area's success to Lt. Lewis Mills in the 4th Precinct. Lt. Mills transferred from a sergeant in the 3rd Precinct to Lt. of Sector 411 approximately six months ago.

"Right away he started working with us to get a feel of the area and formulate

his plan to help bring down the crime," said White. "Lt. Mills is a hands-on guy. He meets with the community leaders, community members and the business community face to face on a constant basis. He has already become a trusted partner and leader to this community."

Over the last couple years there has been tremendous progress in reducing the level of violent crime in Highland Park, said Lt. Mills

"As a sector lieutenant—and city resident—I am naturally happy about that; however, I cannot take credit for it. The bulk of credit goes to the community. They're making a difference. I think the police have gotten better at their jobs, but at the end of the day, it's the citizens who make all the difference. We can't do our jobs without their support," said Lt. Mills.

On April 13, Highland Park leaders

held their 1st Annual Highland Park Spring Break sponsored by the Richmond Police Department in coordination with the Richmond Guardian Angels, Highland Park Quality of Life, Richmond Parks & Recreation, Moore Street Café, Highland Park Neighborhood Watch, Saving Our Youth, VA. Boaz & Ruth, and Councilwoman Ellen Robertson (6th District).

Some of the other events to expect in Highland Park include: Taking it to the Streets with the NOC, NRRRC Prayer Chain for Change, Time to Live Breast Cancer Awareness Walk sponsored by the Richmond Guardian Angels, Community National Night Out, Boaz & Ruth Diamond Talent Contest, We Care Festival hosted by 5th Street Baptist Church, HP Christmas Crawl coordinated by the HP Quality of Life.