

A renewed push to stop crime

Asbury Park, like other Shore-area communities, observed National Night Out last Tuesday with bouncy houses for the kids, shaved-ice giveaways, sand art and other activities aimed at building ties between residents and law enforcement.

That can be a tough sell in the city with the highest crime rate per capita in Monmouth County. Some residents not only distrust the police, but find themselves in a culture where tipping off the police can be seen as snitching, and those civic-minded individuals can often find themselves on the receiving end of often-violent and sometimes deadly reprisals.

Clearly something has to be tried to bridge the gap, especially in Asbury Park, which has seen more than its share of gun violence.

The Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office should be applauded for choosing Asbury Park's Night Out celebration as the place and time to announce its new Crime Stoppers program, a nationwide service that connects law enforcement with citizen tipsters anonymously and offers rewards for useful information.

The program puts a layer of anonymity between an individual and the police, even as it provides a substantial financial incentive for doing the right thing. If an individual's information leads to an arrest, he or she will be awarded up to \$5,000 in cash.

In fact, the national program is based on the principle that someone other than the criminal has information that can solve a crime. It was created to combat the three major problems faced by law enforcement in generating that information: fear of reprisal, apathy and a reluctance to get involved — the very issues that often stymie police investigations in Asbury Park and throughout the county.

It is good to see that acting Monmouth County Prosecutor Christopher Gramiccioni realizes that this is a two-pronged problem.

As he said at the time: "I understand that sometimes there is a distrust of law enforcement, but we're here to change that," he said. "And, if you're not willing to talk to us, then talk to the Crime Stoppers. They're not affiliated with us."

The Crime Stoppers program will not place an added burden on taxpayers. While it is estimated that it will cost between \$10,000 and \$20,000 to get the Crime Stoppers program off the ground, it is worth noting that these funds will, according to Gramiccioni, come from donations, an investment from the Prosecutor's Office and gifts from local police departments.

While this program will undoubtedly be beneficial throughout the county (Monmouth County currently has 12 unsolved homicide cases), Asbury Park could reap great benefits from the program. Gramiccioni said he believes that, with the help of the program, officers will be able to solve many ongoing cases in the county.

Asbury Park residents may live in fear at least some, if not most, of the time.

But Crime Stoppers may provide a way for them to take their city back.