

Item #1 The Park At Woodley Avenue Is Safe (For Gang Members and Bikers)

On Saturday, October 22, more than 100 motorcycle “enthusiasts” gathered at Woodley Avenue Park for a biker rally. Several vans and trucks with items for sale filled the northernmost parking lot. At 11:00 a.m., as I was driving down Woodley from Victory to Burbank, I witnessed a slowdown of traffic because the bikers were doing wheelies in the car lanes -- with vehicles in front and behind them. I was, frankly, shocked. My jaw nearly dropped to the floor. I parked my car on the street and got out to take a closer look and within the span of five minutes, I saw no fewer than a dozen different bikers popping wheelies for at least a hundred yards -- in traffic. Having already gotten a ticket myself for speeding on this street a few years back, I can tell you that these bikers were doing well over 40 mph. On the sidewalk east of Woodley Park I saw a father out for a nice bicycle ride with his two young daughters – I felt horrible for him and his kids because it looked like they were scared and confused as they rode their two wheelers (one with training wheels) past the roaring motorcycles. In my life, I have witnessed an armed bank robbery and an armed grocery store robbery, but I have never seen such a huge and intimidating display of lawlessness.

So I called 911, told my story and was forwarded by the Highway Patrol to the Park Rangers who said they would come out and take a look.

On my return an hour later (around noon) as I was driving back up Woodley, the one-hundred-plus bikers were now all gathering in the middle of the street, again, slowing and blocking traffic. One guy with a big B on his back was trying to coordinate what seemed like an exit. The sellers were still operating their booths. I pulled up further and saw a Park Ranger sitting in his vehicle watching the proceedings. The Ranger appeared young, he looked to be in his mid-twenties. As more and more bikers came out into the middle island area of the street, traffic got even messier, and finally the ranger pulled out from the curb, put on his lights and told the assembled bikers to stop blocking traffic. Then he made a u-turn and left. As he was leaving, two bikers followed him and did wheelies.

This stunned me. So, I called my wife at home to give me the direct number of the Park Rangers. At the Ranger Station, I spoke to the receptionist who told me that there was nothing they could do because the Rangers and Van Nuys PD were both aware that the bikers had a permit. Remember this point. I found it hard to believe that some lunkhead down at Park and Rec would ever approve a gathering like this when Woodley is already victimized by nighttime street racing, but regardless, I reiterated my concerns about the wheelies, blocking and slowing traffic, etc. and the receptionist told me that the situation had been turned over to Van Nuys PD. She didn't know if they were going to come out, but I was concerned that the Ranger had left the scene without doing much more than staying in his mini-truck, turning on his lights and talking over his onboard speaker system. And to top it off, the park ranger left the scene! What more important activity could he possibly have had to attend to?

When the receptionist had had enough of me, I was forwarded to Park Rangers Chief Albert Torres. He was sympathetic and said he would send out some more rangers to take a look. I went home.

At around 4:00 p.m., my wife was driving down that same section on Woodley and saw the same number of bikers out in the park and on the road and the vendors still vending. LAPD had arrived, but while there didn't seem to be any wheelies being performed. When she returned through that same area at around 6 p.m., about half of the bikers and all the vendors were still there.

On Monday morning, I called Louis Loomis, the head of Park and Recreation for our area. He was surprised at what he heard, went through the permit calendar with me and told me he'd research the situation. He called me back within an hour and told me that **no** permit had been issued to the bikers and the vendors who took over our park and street on Saturday.

So the Park Rangers missed this one big time. They also said Van Nuys PD was aware of the permit. How could that be?

Now there's an investigation going on within the Park Rangers. To be honest, I don't expect much. The Park Rangers in our area are reportedly at 50% staff through budget cuts and other fiscal restraints. Their response time and, in this case, response is terrible. They are either underinformed or misinformed, but regardless, it appears that they permitted a lawless and frightening circus to take place on Woodley without so much as asking anyone to show a permit.

Is this what we are to expect from a law enforcement agency?

Several weeks back, while posting agendas, I was talking to a homeless man who complained about getting beaten by gang members in Woodley Avenue Park when he was trying to protect an innocent victim and that it took five hours for the park rangers to arrive and take a report.

I now understand from a highly placed source that about a week ago, a family was accosted by gang members in Woodley Park and the park rangers never even showed up to handle the complaint.

And now, an all-day biker festival on Woodley Avenue without a permit, courtesy of our Park Rangers.

Something needs to be done.

Tomorrow, I will be contacting L.A. City council members Tony Cardenas and Greig Smith and asking for 15 minutes to meet with each one of them in their district offices to discuss this issue. I will also be following up with Chief Albert Robles to find out how the investigation is going and again speaking with Louis Loomis at Park and Rec. That's for starters. I'll let you know how I do. Or you'll read it in the papers. Until then, stay out of Woodley Avenue Park. It is too dangerous, there is no guarantee of safety, and you will be putting yourself and your loved ones at risk.

Item #2 Vendor Sweep Coming Soon

Last May, a stakeholder from Cohasset Street testified as to the nuisance of vendors illegally selling food and such to parents and children on their way to the elementary school. In June, school let out and it is my understanding that a "vendor sweep," where vendors are ticketed and their carts are confiscated, occurred in July. In September, the vendors were back, and, according to Cherie Spamer, the principal of the school, not only were they selling corn with mayo in unhealthy containers, but vendors now were selling BB guns, matches, cigarettes and fireworks to the students. Principal Spamer has confiscated all of these at one time or another. I visited the school on two separate occasions in early October, took pictures, and then emailed District 6 Field Deputy Lynda Levitan, SLO Ron Carter and Dept. of Building and Safety's Frank Bush who all responded to me personally within 48 hours with a date and time of a new vendor sweep on Cohasset. I'm not going to tell you when the sweep will take place, but rest assured, it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen soon, and we have Lynda Levitan, Ron Carter, and Frank Bush to thank for being so quick to organize and respond. Perhaps they'd be willing to transfer to the Park Ranger Division.

Item #3 Neighborhood Watch Forum

Our first Neighborhood Watch Forum with LAPD Senior Lead Officer Ron Carter was held on October 18th at 7:00 p.m. at Lake Balboa Studios. Eight stakeholders attended, which was a good surprise because my publicity plan fell apart, due to my putting too many eggs into the basket of the guy at the Daily News who ended up getting fired/replaced/whatever. But, through our email tree, we got eight, we'll gladly take eight and we'll do it again in January.

Item #4 Gaynor Street Sniffers

Last month, a stakeholder testified as to odors coming from the Tillman Water Reclamation Plant on a regular basis into the Gaynor Street cul de sac. Apparently this has been going on for years. I contacted plant manager Mike Bell the next day and discussed the issue with him. He recommended that we put together a group to come over and “sniff around” in order to identify the offending odor. It took two weeks, but the group came together for an evening tour hosted by engineer John Mays, who did a really great job of communicating how the plant works and how, with a marine layer or change of wind direction, odors can end up sticking around for a while in a neighborhood. The odor most identified by the group was from the secondary aeration tank. It’s an open-air series of tanks – as big as a couple of football fields -- that is filled with water and good bacteria to digest the semi-solids and whatever else is left over from the primary tank. It smells musty, like a bad day at Santa Monica beach.

There is also a five-bay facility just west of the 405 that the Tillman people have no control over. It belongs to a different part of Sanitation within the city. About 32 trucks a day use it to send sludge directly down to Hyperion. The trucks carry a maximum of 3500 gallons down to – I don’t remember how many gallons -- of sewage. I made a separate visit to this facility with John Mays and two other engineers with city sanitation he had invited to watch trucks pull up and unload their “stuff.” Didn’t smell much there, everything seemed pretty cool until we were all standing around on the back side – somehow appropriate – of the facility and all of us got socked with a horrible floating sewage smell that lasted for about 15 seconds. I think the two engineers were trying to ignore it, but their eyes bulged out so much, I had to say something. We tracked it to a possible, non-secure manhole that may have a sump pump that either isn’t working or isn’t even there and should be.