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## High flying cop cuts burglaries 64%

Ripon's powered parachute makes big impact

RIPON — The advent of the powered parachute "Air One" unit in Ripon is credited with helping cut residential burglaries in that community by 64 percent over 10 months compared to the same period last year.

Ripon Police Lt. Ed Ormonde said that the air unit working in concert with ground patrol officers has discouraged additional daytime burglaries throughout the city.

Police Sergeant Steve Merchant – one of the department's pilots – said that when Ripon officers have contacted known parolees on the street they have told officers they were already aware of the air surveillance.

Merchant said officers were initially making contact with known past burglars in an effort to discourage further crimes by giving them the knowledge they were being watched from overhead. He added that the parachute program has obviously been serving as a deterrent.

The Ripon department was the only police agency to implement a powered parachute program throughout the entire state of California. It was last July that Ripon officers were shipped the motorized, slow flying observation unit by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). It was one of only three given out throughout the country.

The program was designed as part of a study to determine the value of using the equipment for law enforcement in small and rural communities throughout the nation.

Ripon police officers have been using the powered parachute to conduct high-visibility neighborhood patrols in areas that have been experiencing a high number of daytime break-ins and burglaries to homes.

"Based on comments to officers by suspects being contacted, I believe that the aviation program has been a great deterrent in helping keep the criminal element out of our city," Ormonde said.

The Ripon powered parachute has also been a successful resource in rescue operations. Shortly after it went into service last summer its pilot located two rafters at dusk who had become lost on the Stanislaus River south of the city – leading ground crews to their location.

Ground searchers had been unable to locate the couple with darkness settling in

when they were spotted from the air.

"Air One" has provided aerial security for public events and has successfully flown crime scene and collision photographic surveillance missions – having the ability to be airborne within minutes of being dispatched, Ormonde said.

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