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Police cut ribbon for substation in vicinity of Antique Row Expected to ease fears of merchants, tourists

By Peter Hermann

The Baltimore Police Department has opened a substation in the Antique Row Mount Vernon area, touting it as a way to keep the historic neighborhoods safe for merchants, residents and tourists.

Officials insisted that the ribbon-cutting had been planned months before the October slaying of Richard Schocket, a hardware store owner who was shot during a Saturday morning hold-up in the heart of the shopping district.

But just the same, Tuesday's grand opening may ease fears of nervous merchants who called for more protection after the shooting and complained that potential customers were too nervous to come to their stores.

"For us here in Baltimore, the more we can do to make people feel comfortable, to make people want to come downtown, the better the place our community will be," said Laurie Schwartz, president of the Downtown Partnership, an organization that promotes businesses.

The substation is at 716 Park Ave., on the side of Biltimore Suites Hotel, which donated the space. The entrance to the red brick building is through a blue-paneled double door.

It was the first of two neighborhood police additions in as many days.

Top city officials and families at Flag House Courts celebrated yesterday the opening of a corner police kiosk in the public housing development near Little Italy.

The Housing Authority set up that police substation, known as a "koban," with an \$80,000 grant from the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation.

The Maryland Boys and Girls Club will work in the koban, which is based on a Japanese model of law enforcement, to tutor and coach youngsters at Flag House Courts.

The koban's opening comes as the city, under federal order, is replacing popular Nation of Islam Security Agency another guard service to patrol the high-rise apartment buildings.

The new Antique Row Mount Vernon substation office is carpeted and decorated with white curtains. But it already is being transformed for its utilitarian function: Two wanted posters hang from the walls.

Central District patrol officers will use the office to write reports, make telephone calls and meet with residents. It will enable them to do much of their desk work in the community, instead of their station on East Baltimore Street.

Philip S. Dubey, president of the Antique Row Association and owner of Dubey's Art and Antiques on Howard Street, said the substation has been planned for six months.

"We've cleaned up the adult book store that was over on Howard Street," Mr. Dubey said. "This is just another step in the community to get . . . things moving in a positive direction for Antique Row and the Mount Vernon area."

Maj. Leonard Hamm, commander of the Central District, said area communities "are experiencing some changes. This, is an effort to turn the tide and kind of restore stability that was once in the neighborhood."

The major said the October slaying is "not indicative of the kinds of concerns that are happening" in the area.

He said most of the problems resolve around panhandling, prostitution and car break-ins.