

W. Phila. gets \$66,000 to fight crime

By Russell Cooke
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Ethan Prescott says he does not believe in locking his car when he parks outside his house near 52d and Locust Streets, even though many residents of his West Philadelphia neighborhood say they are concerned about crime. And Prescott, who is a photographer, does not worry when he goes out at night on assignments for a weekly newspaper.

"Personally, I am, I guess, too dumb to be afraid," he joked yesterday. "But people are robbed almost daily up there on the corner of 52d and Market. . . I know there is a problem and that the whole community would be better off if we could reduce the level of crime."

Now Prescott, who is president of the area's Walnut Hill Civic Association, will have the chance to make his neighbors feel as safe as he does.

The nonprofit arm of his civic group — the Walnut Hill Community Development Corp. — has been selected by a private national foundation to participate in a two-year program to stem street violence and neighborhood crime.

In a ceremony yesterday outside the civic group's offices at 5148 Locust St., U.S. District Judge A. Leon Higginbotham Jr. announced the awarding of \$66,000 in grants from the Washington-based Eisenhower Foundation, several charitable groups and local businesses. Higginbotham is vice chairman of the foundation and served on a 1968 presidential commission on urban violence.

"Next week, next month, next year, our children are going to have to go to school in safe communities," Higginbotham told 20 residents in a parking lot next to the Walnut Hill offices. "Our streets must be safe and violence must be eliminated. . . In the final analysis, what the people in the community can do will be a very, very important factor."

Civic group officials said they would use the money to bolster a town-watch patrol, teach residents how to avoid crime and involve trouble-prone youths in workshops and community activities. A model for the program will be the nearby House of Urmoja, whose co-founder, Falaka Fattah, is on the Eisenhower Foundation board.

Foundation president Lynn A. Curtis said the project was one of 10 in major cities across the country. He said the civic groups had been chosen on the basis of potential and experience. Each will then develop specific proposals.

"Hopefully, that means the program will bubble up, rather than being imposed by some funders," Curtis said.

Walnut Hill residents say they hope the program will address long-standing problems in an area between Market and Spruce Streets, from 45th to 52d Streets. Tony Britt, president of the community development corporation, said, "There was just an overall fear that if I go out alone at night . . . I might become a victim or a statistic."

Prescott added that other anti-crime efforts had fared poorly. For example, a number of the youths who had been taken on summer outings were arrested with marauding packs of muggers in 1981.

"We wondered what we didn't do, or how much more we might have done to start earlier with those kids to develop standards," Prescott said.

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