

'PEACE' RETURNS TO NOTORIOUS STUDENT PARTY NEIGHBORHOOD

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Peace has returned to Paddock Drive at last.

Or, at least, for right now.

After some rowdy Christopher Newport University students descended on the residential neighborhoods around the school and turned some of them into off-campus party central, things came to a sudden crash last fall.

Residents pleaded with the city to help them take their neighborhoods back.

Now, several months later, students who rent homes around the university clean up after themselves, cut the grass and party less - or at least not as loudly, residents say.

"We have peace," said Dawn Young, a Paddock resident for about three decades. "Our street is happy once more."

Last fall, the city began to blanket homes on Mimosa Drive, Barbour Drive, Paddock Drive, Cale Circle and Nutmeg Quarter Place with pamphlets about what entails good neighborly relationships.

The city also put a special hot line and e-mail address in place, and the police implemented a zero-tolerance policy for unruly students.

The crackdown paid off.

Since this past fall, the city has not received a single resident complaint, city and university officials say. At CNU, a serious complaint could lead to suspension or even dismissal from the university.

"We want to make sure the university is a good neighbor," CNU President Paul Tribble told council members recently. "And we want to make sure our students are good neighbors, too."

Friction between residents and students have been brewing for years.

Residents had complained about students partying, vomiting in residents' backyards, neglecting their rented homes and yards, and clogging the streets with their cars and those of guests.

Students likewise found themselves under siege by residents, who in the students' views would not adapt to Newport News' increasingly transforming itself into a student town.

"We keep the yard clean," said Brandon Watson, 21, a business major. "We take good care of the house. They should not treat us like children."

Last year, the police knocked on his door - he lives with his 20-year-old sister Jennifer in a home his parents own on Paddock Drive - when a get-together on his deck, at least for his neighbors' taste, grew out of hand.

"We always have been on good terms with our neighbors," said Watson's sister, who is also a business major. "When we have problems, we worked them out. We will keep the partying down. We have already."

The city knew for some time about the tensions between the students and residents. As early as 2005, residents met with CNU and city officials, including the city's police chief, to discuss unruly students.

"Bad behavior is not being tolerated by us," Tribble said.

In the wake of the newly mended fences between residents and students, the city will create a committee - composed of students, residents and city officials - that will meet regularly.

"We have peace," Young said. "The kids are doing great, but it can't stop here. Otherwise, we slip right back to where we started."

In the last 10 years, CNU grew from 300 residential students to more than 3,000 and is planning to add another 1,000 beds, Tribble said.

"Perhaps what we need to do is to require all students to live on campus," Tribble said. "I am prepared to recommend this to my board. We are committed to do that."

Campus police can respond to students' rowdiness on and off campus, but enforcing illegal parking, for example, remains a city matter, Tribble said.

"I think everybody here on the street is finally catching on," said Jonathan Mills, 21, a horticulture major. "Have a few friends come over, but don't let them bring people you don't know."

Paddock Drive had a bit of a party reputation up until last fall, he said.

"Taking care of a house prepares you for life," said Mills, who never had problems with police or neighbors since he moved to Paddock Drive in August. "I definitely live up to this responsibility."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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