



By Amy Sylvestri

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The San Leandro police offered safety tips for using the newly opened Estudillo parking garage at a meeting at the Main Library Tuesday last week.

No crimes have happened at the garage yet, but it's opening is a good opportunity to talk public safety, police said.

Officer Tim DeGrano told the small crowd that the parking garage is safe, but could be a spot for potential crimes like muggings because it gives thieves places to hide, such as stairwells or between cars.

"We don't live in Sparkle City," said DeGrano. "I wish we did. But the reality is that there are a few ne'er-do-wells looking for any opportunity."

DeGrano said that the police are constantly patrolling the garage since its opening in November and that many improvements have been made over the old garage, such as better lighting in the stairwells and a more open walkway between the garage and the Wells Fargo on East 14th Street.

"The lighting is very good," said DeGrano. "With the old structure we had some issues with the homeless and we had some stairwell robberies, but so far, there haven't been any issues like that with the new structure."

DeGrano said that Police Chief Sandra Spagnoli has patrolled the garage herself and “was pleasantly surprised.”

DeGrano said that he walked all over the four-floor garage with his cell phone looking for dead spots where calls could be dropped or hard to complete. He said he only found one bad spot – on the ground floor in a corner.

The San Leandro police met with other local police departments to see how they patrol their downtown parking garages.

The Alameda cops told DeGrano that they actually had to swap out their environmentally friendly lighting for traditional lights because the “green” lights left too much of the structure in the dark.

Hayward police told him that they had a problem with people dumping abandoned vehicles in their garage, but DeGrano said parking patrol units will be on the job to prevent that here.

DeGrano said that it is important for each San Leandran to take responsibility for their personal safety. Walk in pairs, with your keys ready, and not distracted by cell phones or weighed down with too many shopping bags.

“Say you are walking with your head down, looking in your purse,” said DeGrano. “We call that in law enforcement, ‘a target,’ we also call that a ‘victim-to-be.’ If you don’t look like a target, they (a criminal) is going to move on to someone else. They want it to be easy. They want that loose purse or that cell phone in hand.”

Other tips from DeGrano:

Never have a too-established routine such as always leaving the office at the same time or taking the same route home.

“Chirp” your car alarm when you are a few feet away from your car to startle any potential lurking criminals.

List someone under the title “ICE” in your cell phone contact list. It stands for In Case of Emergency and will help police or paramedics contact your loved ones more quickly in case something happens to you – they don’t know if “Bob” is your husband or your fifth cousin if he’s only listed by his name on your phone.

CAPTION: The staircases in the parking garage could be a place for thieves, police say.

PHOTO BY AMY SYLVESTRI