

Crime down, but ...

By Peter Hermann, *BaltimoreSun.com*, May 28, 2009

The good news from Baltimore Sun's Justin Fenton this morning is that crime is down in just about every category this year, from burglaries to violent crime. Homicides, during an unusually slow May, are on par with last year, which recorded a 20-year low. See the Baltimore Sun's homicide map.

Still, Baltimore is a violent city -- four people were slain over the holiday weekend and another person was stabbed near downtown on Sunday night. We still have a lot of work to do but the numbers are encouraging. Of course, the numbers mean nothing if you are among the victims.

I spent Saturday night driving around the city with City Councilman William H. Cole IV and the Peter Collier, the deputy director of the Parking Authority. I wanted to see what it was like when clubs are open; we hear of so much violence, from stabbings at the Inner Harbor to shootings outside the Belvedere, that I wanted to see for myself (above, Baltimore Sun's Karl Ferron took this picture of a man being arrested after a fight on Calvert Street near the Inner Harbor on Saturday night).

We drove from club to club; some were quiet, others were hopping, including Club One and another spot near the Farmer's Market under the JFX, where an international heavy-metal festival attracted about 2,000 people.

We raced from a fight on Calvert Street near the Inner Harbor to a disturbance on Saratoga and Gay streets back to another fight on The Block. The commander of the Central District, Maj. John Bailey, was out late, as he always is on the weekends, looking for trouble. There were four cops working overtime at a single garage on Water Street and another two hired by the Belvedere Condo Association to watch over the clubs in that building.



One of the, Suite Ultralounge, has been targeted by the city for closure; the liquor board pulled its license but the owners have a stay until a Circuit Court judge rules on its appeal. One of the owners, Louis Wood, spoke to Bailey and one of the Mount Vernon leaders and told them he only had 60 kids for an underage night inside his club on Saturday. That made it easy for Bailey, who likes the club to close at 11 p.m. so the kids can get off the street and back home by midnight curfew (At left, a pic by Ferron of Cole and Maj.

Bailey talking about the Ultralounge on Saturday night).

But other clubs were more trouble, including a new one on Calvert Street that just suddenly appeared. It looked as if someone had put a sign in a vacant building and announced a party. By the end of the night, city police had to close not only East Baltimore Street, which do when The Block shuts down, but also North Calvert Street because of the clubs and illegally parked cars blocking a lane.

Of the clubs, Cole said, "It's a moving target."

It's nice to see crime down. But judging from what I saw Saturday night into Sunday morning, we still have work to do. But again, it's less the cops and more the people who come, a diverse crowd that could include metal-heads, hip-hop fans, suburbanites at a wedding, college kids at Brewer's Art and families taking a night-time stroll at the Inner Harbor or enjoying a meal.

We were standing outside the Water Street garage when a group of kids walked by. They were loud and jostling each other, and Bailey stepped out into the sidewalk to ask them to quiet down a bit. They brushed by him without saying a word, but they did get quiet, at least until they reached the end of the block, headed toward the Harbor.

It was 12:30 a.m. and Cole wondered where they could be going. "There are no clubs down there, nothing," he said. Earlier, he wondered aloud, "There has got to be away all this can co-exist."