

WFPD (Wichita Falls Police Department) to offer training for rental community managers

By [Jessica Langdon \(Contact\)](#)
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Jeannie Rogers manages the El Dorado Court Apartments and has been with the property nearly nine years.

The smaller rental community doesn't tend to see a lot of crime-related problems that might be more common in some larger ones, Rogers said, and one of her goals is to make sure it stays that way. This week, she had someone look at the property and identify ways to improve security, and she plans to take those steps.

Rogers also looks forward to learning even more about how to keep crime out of the rental community, during an eight-hour training session in December, led by members of the Wichita Falls Police Department.

"I'm real interested, just from what they have said," Rogers said.

On Dec. 8, 9, 11 and 12, managers of rental properties from across the city will attend sessions on a technique called Crime Free Multi-Housing.

Members of the WFPD's Community Services Section and the crime analyst discovered officers spent more than 12,000 man hours — a conservative estimate — within 12 months responding to calls in multifamily housing communities. As they searched for solutions, they discovered the Crime Free Multi-Housing technique, which more than 2,000 communities in 11 countries are using — and seeing results.

For many rental communities in Wichita Falls, the training is required. Wichita Falls City Council members approved an ordinance Oct. 8, requiring managers with 10 or more rental units to attend a free eight-hour training class. It will cover a variety of topics aimed at making those communities — as well as surrounding neighborhoods — safer, said Sgt. Joe Snyder, public information officer for the Wichita Falls Police Department and supervisor of the Community Services Section.

The managers will be "learning how to recognize criminal enterprise, and how to make their properties inviting to legitimate users and uninviting to property abusers," Snyder said.

Snyder, Officer Steve Carroll and Officer Jeff Hughes have received their certification to train the managers and will teach the first sessions in December to get the program on its feet quickly.

While the training is required for many of the managers within the city, it's also open to those with smaller multifamily communities and to properties that lie outside Wichita Falls' boundaries.

"We'll accept managers from outside the city limits because we feel the information is that beneficial to the apartment communities," Snyder said.

The managers who are required to go through the training have a three-month window during which they must complete the training.

The class makes up the first phase of Crime Free Multi-Housing certification, the only phase that is required for properties in the city. The program offers opportunities for second and third levels of certification on a voluntary basis. The second tier involves a security inspection with suggestions for solutions, and the third involves an annual safety social at the property.

Rogers and several other managers have already signed up for their training sessions and say they look forward to it as well as to taking their certification to the highest level.

"I'm planning on taking it as far as I can go," Rogers said.

Members of the North Texas Rental Properties Association have been hearing for the past several months about the program, and they have offered their support from the first meetings.

"Of course I can't think of a single property owner that would say, 'I welcome drug activity or gang activity in my complex,' " said Association Executive Sandi Barfield. "There's just not any negative things about this."

She said she and others look forward to getting things started and said she wouldn't have minded seeing this type of program take shape years ago.

Safety of residents is a primary concern, she said, and she is excited about property managers being able to do a further background check on prospective tenants.

A key focus of the Crime Free Multi-Housing program is to give communities the resources that will help them keep the criminal element out of their units to begin with.

To Rogers, that will make such a difference and spare managers the need to work through a lot of red tape trying to remove people who prove to present criminal problems.

"Once they get in, it's very hard to get them out," she said. Everyone working together will be a huge help and possibly help curb problems such as drug activity in the community, she believes.

The communication element of the program will benefit everyone, she said.

Barfield looks forward to properties having a solid rapport with each other and the police to keep crime out.

Like Rogers and Barfield, Pamela Vest, regional manager for UAH Property Management and manager of Parkstone Senior Village, has signed up for her training session and is excited about the prospect.

Many people have chosen over the years to live in Wichita Falls because it has that safe small-town feel, but the times aren't what they once were, Vest said. You can't leave your doors unlocked as you might have a few generations ago, she said.

"It is just not that way anymore between the gangs and the criminal element," she said.

No community is immune to the possibility of crime, she said. You never really know who might be around.

"I'm real protective of my residents out here because they're elderly," she said. She wants to be able to say to people who shouldn't be there that someone is keeping an eye out.

"We want to do everything we can to keep our residents as safe as we can, and I think this is a step in the right direction to achieve that," she said, adding that it's also important for the employees.

Her community is excited, and she said she knows the police are excited about this as well. The City Council's commitment to the program with the new ordinance also caught her attention.

"I think that's great they'd get involved on that level. They're that excited about it, too," she said. She's ready to offer her full support to the program, and plans to follow through with the voluntary phases.

Rogers also likes the idea that prospective tenants will be able to learn more from the police after the program is running. Police will be able to tell someone the management has attended the training and what level of certification has been achieved as well as provide some numbers when it comes to police responses to the locations. It gives police the opportunity to tell people more about the businesses, Snyder said.

This is a multifaceted approach to keeping properties crime free, Snyder said. The classes that will take place from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 8, 9, 11 and 12 at the training center at 710 Flood St., have limited seating, so reservations are necessary. Property managers may reserve a seat for one of the sessions by calling (940) 720-5007.

"We hope that the residents will begin to see immediate results of this partnership between police and apartment communities," Snyder said.

When Rogers talked to the owner of the property, he expressed the need to do whatever it takes to be compliant and whatever it takes to keep people safe, she said.

"That's one of our No. 1 things, is keeping our tenants feeling safe," she said.

Barfield said she looks forward to working with the officers on this effort.

"They're geared up and ready to go, and we are, too," she said.

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