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Neighborhoods work to control prostitutes, pimps



In this Oct. 4, 2012 Los Angeles Daily News file photo, a woman is detained in Sun Valley for soliciting prostitution. With a widespread problem of street prostitution throughout her district, L.A. Councilwoman Nury Martinez is working to bring together different citizen groups to help combat the problem.

By [Rick Orlov](#), Los Angeles Daily News

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From the commercial corridors of Sepulveda Boulevard in Van Nuys and Lankershim Boulevard in North Hollywood to the residential roadways of Sun Valley, the problem of street prostitution is resulting in citizen groups increasing efforts to combat the hookers and pimps taking over the streets.

Councilwoman Nury Martinez, who took office in late July, said it has become one of her top priorities, and she is working with the Los Angeles Police Department, state legislators and residents to try to clean up the areas.

“We are trying to get a coordinated effort with the LAPD and all the community groups that have been out there or just starting up,” Martinez said.

In Sun Valley, the Coalition Against Human Trafficking has been working for several years to deal with the problem — organizing residents and businesses and working through the Community Police Advisory Board to develop enforcement strategies.

“This is a problem that has been out here for decades,” said Jesse Torrero, a leader in the coalition. “It started on San Fernando Road in the 1920s and has stayed here all these years.”

Over in Van Nuys, Don Schultz recently started Group Against Street Prostitution (GASP), which he hopes to model after the efforts in Sun Valley and other parts of the city.

Torrero said his organization, in conjunction with the LAPD, was able to effect the arrest of 22 pimps since January, though he fears the problem is just migrating. “We are seeing more in Pacoima and other areas,” Torrero said.

Martinez praised the work of the neighborhood activists. “Certainly, we wish we didn’t have to form community groups like Coalition Against Human Trafficking and GASP in our community, but the city law enforcement can’t do it all by itself,” Martinez said.

“It is these groups, with their eyes on the neighborhood, who spend their own personal time working with us to combat this scourge in our neighborhoods. It is a 24/7 battle, and I am going to work hand in hand with all parties to combat this ever adapting problem.”

Martinez is also working with state legislators to try to increase the penalties for pimping in the state.

Lt. Dennis Ballas, the LAPD’s Valley Bureau vice coordinator, said the department has roving teams going to areas throughout the San Fernando Valley that are frequently used by prostitutes and their pimps.

“We have been focusing the last couple of years on pimping,” Ballas said. “We are seeing differences in the operations. You no longer see an independent operator. The pimps now are trolling, looking for potential victims. And we are seeing younger and younger prostitutes — some as young as 12 or 14. The entry level seems to be getting younger and younger.”

Ballas noted that part of the problem is the glamorization of hookers in television and movies that leads girls to believe it is somehow acceptable.

The LAPD often coordinates with private social-service groups such as the Mary Magdalene Project in Van Nuys, which provides shelter, counseling and even a drop-in center for women and girls impacted by prostitution or domestic trafficking.

Erickson Albrecht, president of Mary Magdalene, has noticed increasingly sophisticated operations that make use of the Internet. “Historically, we have dealt with adult women, but more recently we are dealing with younger women and girls,” he said. “We are working with them to build a program to get them back in schools and with their families.”

About the Author



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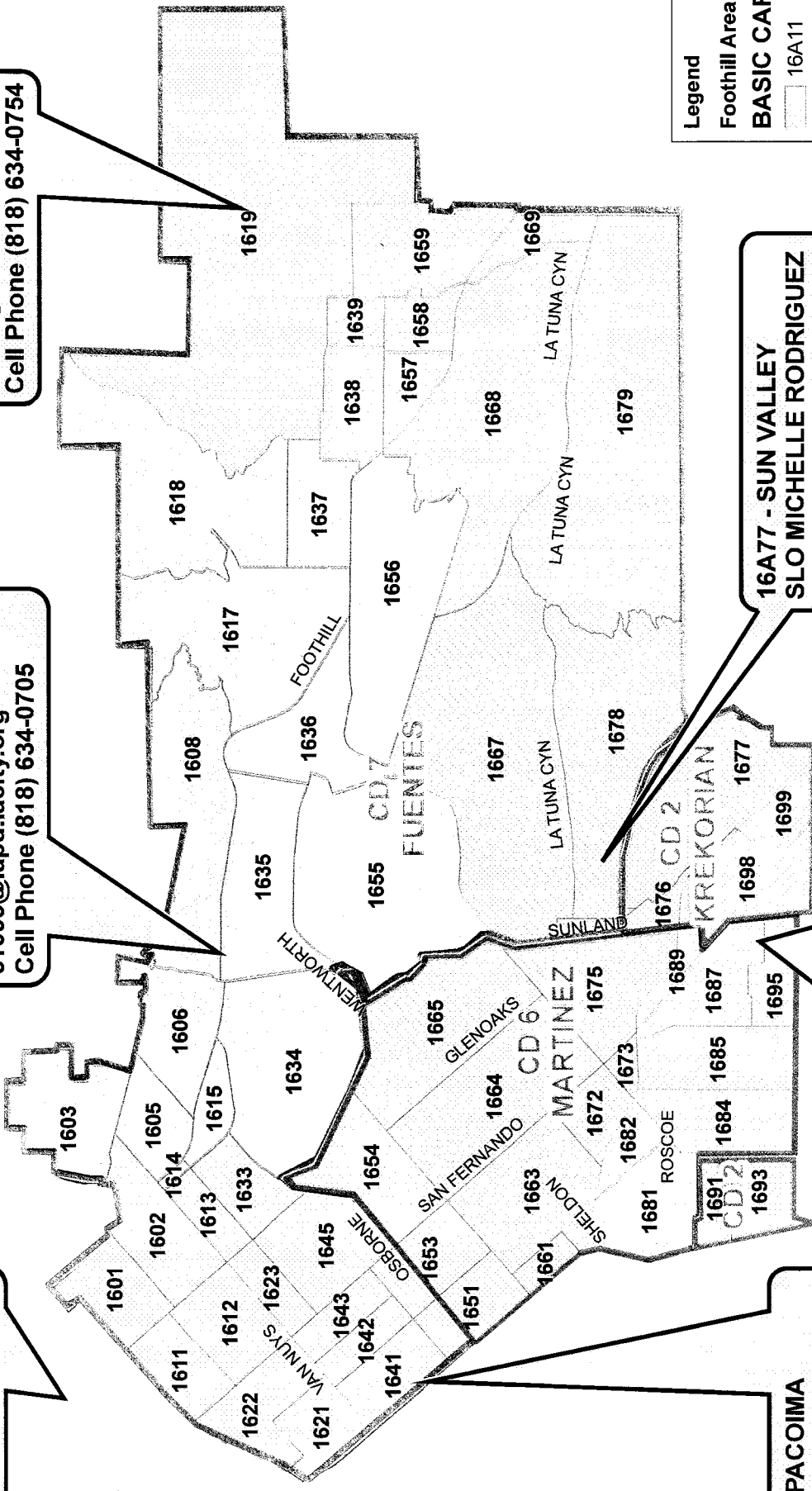
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