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Modesto police: Downtown cameras catch teens casing parked cars

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The camera system that looks for crime in downtown Modesto produced its first arrests late Friday when officers used the surveillance video to catch three teenage boys suspected of trying to steal vehicles from a parking lot, police said.

The Modesto teens, ages 14, 14 and 15, were arrested on suspicion of attempted vehicle theft and conspiracy to commit a crime, said Modesto police Lt. Ron Cloward.

The boys were booked at the Stanislaus County Juvenile Hall. Police did not release their names because they are minors.

"We have people here that were going to be victimized had it not been for these cameras," Cloward said Saturday.

It's been four weeks since Modesto police started using the monitoring system to watch the downtown and investigate crime reports.

Friday's incident occurred shortly before 11:30 p.m. at the parking lot on 11th and K streets, near Tenth Street Plaza.

Cloward said officers were watching the camera monitors when they spotted the three teens loitering in the parking lot.

He said the teens, working together, moved through the parking lot and attempted to get into the vehicles.

The officers monitoring the lot directed patrol officers to the teens. Cloward said the officers found the teens carrying shaved keys, which are commonly used by vehicle thieves.

Cloward said the teens admitted to police that they were trying to steal the vehicles. He said the teens had no idea they were being watched.

Officers are stationed watching live footage from the cameras during the peak hours of the downtown club scene on weekend nights. Otherwise, the cameras record footage that can be archived for 30 days.

City government leaders and downtown club owners are looking to the cameras to reduce the \$305,000 each year that the Modesto Police Department spends on overtime patrolling downtown Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. The system cost the city \$340,000 for 10 cameras.

Cloward hopes to expand the system. He's looking for grants that could yield funding for a camera at the Ninth Street bus station. Other businesses could raise money to put cameras at key intersections near their properties.

"Our hope is that we're creating a safer environment for downtown Modesto," Cloward said.

Bee staff writer Rosalio Ahumada can be reached at rahumada@modbee.com or 578-2394.



(BART AH YOU/bahyou@modbee.com) Modesto has installed a video monitoring system downtown to monitor the club scene. These cameras are locate at 10th and J Streets. May 6, 2009 - Modesto Bee - Bart Ah You

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