



Thank you to all who attended the Women's Safety Forum on August 14, 2008. The crowd was much larger than I expected, and I was glad to be a part of what I hope was a way to empower women in our community. The four officers from the Valdosta Police Department and the Lowndes County Sheriff's Office were outstanding speakers and are working on ways to continue training us to defend ourselves. When a self-defense class is announced, I'll forward the information to you. Commander Eugene Bell from the Valdosta Police Department listed the tips below to reduce the chance of becoming the victim of an attacker.

PERSONAL SAFETY

- Common sense and vigilance is the key. If you see suspicious activity of any type, call 911.
- Keep your eyes and ears open.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Don't be oblivious to the people who are around you.
- Understand that there is a tendency on the part of criminals to be out more during hours of darkness than hours of daylight. After dark if you are going to be out take extra precautions to ensure your safety. During hours of darkness, if possible travel in groups. There is safety in numbers.
- Stay in well lit areas as much as possible.
- Stay in well populated areas.
- Keep your cell phone charged and easily available for use.
- Even during daylight hours don't let your guard down.
- Don't hold conversations with people you don't know. I'm not saying don't be friendly, just don't be overly friendly.
- If you are the victim of a crime or you encounter suspicious activity, call 911 immediately. Don't wait! The faster you call law enforcement, the better opportunity law enforcement has to catch the bad guy/girl.
- Carry a whistle or some other type device with you that makes a loud noise. When you are walking or jogging, use the noise device if you are attacked or if you feel threatened to draw attention to yourself.
- Don't be a willing victim. If someone tries to harm you or kidnap you, yell and scream and fight back. Make it difficult for the attacker.
- Don't give out personal information about you, your family, your friends, etc.
- Don't carry large sums of money on your person.
- If someone tries to rob you and wants your purse or your wallet, give it to them. It is not worth you getting injured or killed.
- If someone tries to kidnap you, don't go with them. If you go with them, the place they take you is what is called the "second crime scene." If they want to do harm to you, make them do it right there, not in some isolated dark place where they are free to do what they want.

VEHICLE SAFETY

- When approaching your vehicle, have your keys ready to use to get into your car or if necessary to use as a defensive weapon.
- Check the inside of your car before you enter it. If your door is unlocked and you know you didn't leave it that way, don't get in your car. Call 911 and have an officer check inside.
- When in your vehicle, keep all doors locked, windows up and sun/moon roof closed.
- Don't stop on the road to be a Good Samaritan. If you see someone in trouble on the road, call 911 and let the Police handle the situation.
- Don't leave your car running and unattended while you enter any building or other location no matter how short a period of time you are away from your vehicle.
- Don't leave your car keys anywhere in your car when the car is unattended. Many people have a bad habit of leaving keys in the ignition overnight, in the glove box, on the seat and in other places in the car.
- When you acquire a license plate for your vehicle, don't get a plate that indicates that you are a woman. I am speaking of plates such as "Ms. B", "Mom", "Hers" or anything else that would tell someone who has criminal intent that a particular car belongs to a woman.
- Don't leave items in your vehicle which display your home address, your home or cell phone numbers or any personal information about you. As a matter of fact, when you exit your car, if possible don't leave anything on the seat or anywhere in the vehicle that is visible to someone from the outside. Place items in the glove box or in the trunk.
- If and when you go to a shopping center, find a parking space that is close to the business and that will be in a lit and populated area if you return to your car at night. Avoid (if possible) parking at the back of the lot or long distances away from the business.
- When you enter your garage, lower your garage door as soon as possible after you enter, reducing the opportunity for someone to follow you in. Keep an eye in your rearview mirror for anyone coming in behind you. If that occurs, raise the door with your door opener and drive out. If you don't have an automatic car door opener, buy one.
- Make sure that you have fuel and that your vehicle is in good running condition so you don't get stranded in some out of the way place.
- If someone tries to carjack you, drive away if possible. If that isn't possible because they are in the car, give them the car. You get out and again yell and scream. Call 911 immediately.
- If you do get stranded in your vehicle and you feel you are in a dangerous place, call law enforcement (by dialing 911).
- Don't get out of your car to fix a flat or check the engine if you have a road service plan. Call them and let them do it. Stay in your car with the doors locked and wait.
- If you don't have a road service plan, get one. If you can't afford one and you get stranded, stay in your vehicle with your doors locked and use your cell phone to call the 911 operator. Inform them of your situation and ask that a law enforcement officer and a tow truck be dispatched to your location.
- When possible, have a passenger ride with you, especially if you are traveling long distances or if you are traveling at night.

HOME SAFETY

- Keep your doors and windows locked.
- If you see strange people acting suspiciously in your neighborhood, call 911.
- If you see strange vehicles acting suspiciously in your neighborhood, call 911.

- Install a burglar/fire alarm in your residence and use it. Don't give your code to anyone other than people you trust and who have a need to have the code.
- Help organize a neighborhood watch program. We at the Police Department can help with that endeavor.
- Don't leave your keys sticking in your locking mechanism of your doors at home if the doors have glass where the key can be seen and the glass can be broken. An intruder can easily break the glass, turn the key and gain access to your residence.
- Don't fall into this national campaign of "DON'T BE A SNITCH." Report criminal activity.
- Don't keep large sums of money in your house.
- Don't advertise to people that you have a safe or jewelry or other valuables at your home.
- If you have workers in your home, put your valuables away and have someone there with you while the workers are there.
- Don't leave car or house keys outside under door mats, on top of ledges, or anywhere that an intruder will have access to them.
- Don't advertise the fact that you live alone if that is the case.
- If an intruder enters your house with you in it, get out. Don't worry about your "stuff." You can get more "stuff." Go to a neighbor's house and call 911. While enroute to the neighbor's house, yell and scream and let people know there is a problem.
- Don't open your doors in the middle of the night for people who knock on your door unless you are expecting visitors.
- If you are expecting visitors, use your peep hole before opening the door during daylight and at nighttime.
- Be a nosey neighbor. Get to know your neighborhood (i.e. who comes and goes, what cars are normally in what driveway, etc.)

Valdosta is a great city. Crime in Valdosta is actually down. There is no need to be paranoid. Simply use common sense and the safety tips depicted above.

There are a number of additional tips that I could provide. The bottom line is to use common sense, be vigilant, be aware of your surroundings, and don't be oblivious to those around you. Valdosta is a great city to live. We have great citizens and an even greater environment. However, we are now a "Metropolitan City" and with the good, unfortunately comes the bad. That does not mean that our city is destined to be a Mecca for crime. That decision is up to us. As SSgt Dukes from the Sheriff's Office stated at the forum, where there are people, there is crime. He is 100% correct about that. Unfortunately, we are going to experience crime in our community. We as a community, however, can decide that we are going to fight crime, by working together and using these and other safety tips to keep ourselves and our community safe. We can also send a message to those who commit crimes that we will report and prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law because we are a law abiding community. Please feel free to contact us at the Valdosta Police Department if we may be of assistance to you.

Eugene Bell, Jr., Commander

Bureau of Investigative Services
 Valdosta Police Department
 500 N. Toombs Street
 Valdosta, GA 31601
 (229) 293-3107-Work
 (229) 293-3152-Fax
ebell@valdostacity.com

Amy A. Carter

State Representative, District 175
 PO Box 4930
 Valdosta, GA 31604-4930
 (229) 245-2733
amy.carter@house.ga.gov