Report:
Crime growing as Hub City grows

By Dan McCaleb
Staff Writer

As the city of Lafayette grows, certain local crime statistics will continue to show increases.

That's why local police officials say they aren't too worried about the slight increases identified in a mid-year crime report released this week.

"The report indicates that the number of index crimes has gone up by about 13 percent during the first six months of this year as compared to the same time last year," Lt. Ned Ewing of the Lafayette Police Department said.

"But because the city continues to grow and because of the fact that we're covering 10 percent more area now than we did during the first five months of last year, it's sort of like comparing apples and oranges."

While those areas -- including territory south of Kaliste Saloom Road, north of Pont Des Mouton Road and near Acadian Village -- aren't considered high-crime neighborhoods, they will affect the overall interpretation of crime stats.

"We're going to really need a full year from June 1 to get a solid indication of where we're going," Ewing said. "But the statistics as they are now do indicate a couple of trends."

Among the trends, according to Ewing, are the murder figures. Four homicides have been reported in the Hub City during the first half of 1994, the same number recorded in January through June in 1993, when the city finished with a three-year low in its murder rate with just seven.

"It's starting to look like the preceding years were the abnormal ones," Ewing said of 1992 and 1993, when Lafayette had recorded seven and nine murders by the mid-year mark respectively and finished each year with a record 18 homicides. "Obviously, we like last year's and this year's marks better."

One area of concern, however, is the continued dramatic increase in automobile thefts.

Auto thefts have increased a staggering 162 percent, from 100 through the first six months of 1994 to 262 during the same span this year.

Other thefts have jumped by nearly 12 percent, from 2,950 last year at the end of June to 3,272, the first six months of this year.

"You can't explain away the rise in thefts, auto thefts particularly, to an increased coverage area," Ewing said. "We think those increases are, to some extent, indicative of the growing drug problems we have here. We get reports all the time of people trading their cars for drugs, are lending their cars to someone else to go get drugs. But then they get nervous and report the vehicle stolen."

Overall, index crimes rose from 4,311 from January to June in 1994 to 4,884 during the same time span this year. Index crimes are those major crimes -- murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, theft and automobile theft -- that local agencies are required to report to the FBI monthly.

Ewing pointed out that, while crime appears to have increased, the number of residents in the city has also increased as well as has number of police officers patrolling the city.

"We're up to about 205 officers filling 210 available spots," Ewing said. "That's the largest we've ever been. We gained eight new positions over the last year, and we'll continue to get more positions as the city grows."