Crime drops; cleared cases up

By MELISSA MOORE

Major crimes in Baton Rouge dropped 11 percent last year after a steady climb each year since 1986 and city police solved cases at a higher rate than any year since 1989, statistics show.

Mayor Tom McHugh and Police Chief Greg Phares praised the efforts of police and community groups for contributing to both statistics when the numbers were released at a news conference Friday.

"The good results are direct results of the police department and the community working together," McHugh said.

"It doesn't mean we have solved the problem, but it does mean we have made a start," he said.

Phares was cautious about calling the decrease a trend.

"One good year does not make a trend, but it is a hopeful sign," the police chief said.

In Baton Rouge, 38,095 major crimes — murder, manslaughter, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, theft and auto theft — were reported to police in 1994.

In 1993, 42,895 major crimes were reported, police records show.

Murders and non-negligent manslaughter cases decreased 14 percent, from 74 in 1993 to 64 in 1994. Three negligent manslaughter incidents were investigated each year.

Rapes were up 3 percent, from 174 in 1993 to 180 in 1994 and assaults decreased 8 percent, from 11,078 in 1993 to 10,067 in 1994.

Burglaries were down 29 percent, from 7,543 in 1993 to 5,354 last year. Thefts dropped 9 percent from 18,136 in 1993 to 16,438 in 1994, but car thefts jumped 12 percent from 4,006 in 1993 to 4,498 in 1994.

Robberies decreased 21 percent, from 1,666 in 1993 to 1,370 last year.

Police solved 22 percent of those crimes, records said.

Police cleared 84 percent of the murders.

Instances of major crime in Baton Rouge

Crime

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and non-negligent manslaughter cases were cleared.

All three negligent manslaughter cases were cleared.

In 1993, 74 percent of the 74 murders and non-negligent manslaughter cases were cleared.

Clearance rates for rape, assault, burglary, theft and auto theft also increased last year.

In 1994, 40 percent of rapes were cleared, up a point from the 39 percent cleared in 1993.

The clearance rate for assaults went up from 50 percent in 1993 to 59 percent in 1994.

Burglary clearance rates increased 1 percent in 1994, with 39 percent of those cases solved.

Thefts were solved at a rate of 18 percent, up 4 percent from 1993 and the auto theft clearance rate increased from 4 percent to 7 percent.

Twenty-six percent of robberies were cleared in 1994, down 2 percent from the 1993 robbery clearance rate.

But Phares said police are solving more crimes this year, and the rate of robberies by violent robbers has remained the same.

In 200 cases, the number of police involved in repeat offenders, he said.

Both McHugh and Phares had special praise for Operation Takedown, the strike force that has been targeting drugs and guns in high-crime neighborhoods since June of 1993.

Phares said the group has seized 527 weapons and made about 2,500 arrests. Nearly 2,000 of the arrests involved repeat offenders, he said.

McHugh said the guns being taken off the streets due to Operation Takedown eliminated some homicides, he said.

The TID Club, which targets specific neighborhoods having crime waves, and the community policing program, which aims to link police and communities, have also helped, the mayor said.

The mayor and the police chief lauded community groups for working with police to take back neighborhoods and then to keep them safe.

Phares said the 100 Black Men, which helps revitalize neighborhoods and provides mentors for poor black children, are what will ultimately make the difference.

"You have to accept a high failure rate, but if you save one or two or three, you've done a lot of good," he said.

The Mid-City Redevelopment Alliance and community groups in Melrose East are other good examples of programs that are working, he said.