Violent crime dips in BR

City has fewer property crimes during 1998

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Fewer violent crimes, particularly robberies, were reported inside and outside Baton Rouge city limits last year than in 1997, police and Sheriff’s Office crime statistics show.

Police also recorded fewer property crimes, but the Sheriff’s Office reported more than in 1997, according to the statistics, which are gathered for the FBI.

The FBI collects information about murders and actual and attempted rapes, robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries, thefts and motor vehicle thefts.

The overall crime counts showed a 7.9 percent decline inside the city and a 3.4 percent jump in the area of East Baton Rouge Parish covered by the Sheriff’s Office.

Mayor Tom Ed McHugh said “any downward trend is encouraging” and added that he’s pleased with the Police Department’s clearance rates.

“We’re doing good law enforcement. We’re seeing some changes in the criminal pattern,” the mayor said.

Sheriff Elmer Litchfield said he was pleased crime had dropped in places.

See CRIME, Page 5A

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The Advocate
March 11, 1999
Page 1A
Column 25
Over Page 5A
Column 3-4
Police, which in 1998 formed the Armed Robbery Division to investigate primarily business holdups, recorded 11.4 percent fewer robberies, dropping from 1,454 in 1997 to 1,288 last year. Police Chief Greg Phares said he was particularly encouraged by that, and by the increase in robberies solved, from 21.8 percent in 1997 to 26.6 percent last year.

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The Sheriff’s Office investigated 250 robberies, a 16.9 percent drop from the 301 reported in 1997. “We’ve gotten some of the people off the street who were doing that,” Litchfield said.

Rapes also dropped inside and outside the city. Police reported 110, 23.6 percent fewer than the 144 reported in 1997.

The Sheriff’s Office investigated 48 rapes, 7 fewer than the previous year. Although the number of violent crimes declined overall, some individual crimes had small increases.

The city recorded 63 murders in 1998, up 6.8 percent from the 59 recorded in 1997. The city also had four negligent homicides, up from two in 1997.

The Sheriff’s Office counted 10 homicides, down two from 1997, and one negligent homicide, down from three.

However, the Sheriff’s Office report showed an increase in aggravated assaults while the city had a decline.

The Sheriff’s Office reported 386 aggravated assaults in 1998, 4.6 percent more than in 1997.

Police reported a 9.3 percent decline, from 1,135 in 1997 to 1,030 last year.

Aggravated assaults, according to the FBI’s definition, can include threats with a weapon when no one is injured, or a shooting in which someone is seriously wounded but survives.

Like the violent crime numbers, property crime statistics showed better news in some areas than in others.

Auto thefts dropped inside and outside the city in 1998, records show.

The Sheriff’s Office investigated 840 auto thefts, down 14.6 percent from the 984 reported in 1997. Police had 2,572, down 16.5 percent from the 3,081 reported in 1997.

But police recorded a slight increase in burglaries, from 5,097 in 1997 to 5,165 last year, police records show.

The Sheriff’s Office recorded a 9.1 percent drop in the number of burglaries, from 2,191 in 1997 to 1,991 last year.

The Sheriff’s Office reported a 9.2 percent increase in thefts and police reported an 8.6 percent drop, records show.

McHugh said he believes public and official awareness of the level of the crime problem is helping to fuel the overall decline.

In the early 1990s, McHugh said, a law enforcement tax he proposed was soundly defeated because the serious crime problem existed in “pockets” around town.

Between 1993 — Baton Rouge’s record murder year — and 1995, crime reached nearly everyone’s neighborhood, he said.

“We’re seeing a heightened awareness on the part of our population,” he said.