

Charles 'Hoss' Ellington  
1935-2014



Hoss Ellington and his driver Donnie Allison in the

## Crime puts a neighborhood ON EDGE

Residents in Carolina Place/Ardmore area say peaceful life rocked by gunfire, thefts

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Sprinkled among the almost-daily postings of lost-and-found items and notices of yard sales on the Carolina Place-Ardmore Neighborhood Association's Facebook page is a strain of something more disconcerting.

There are photos of blue lights at a shooting scene from April 27. "Not sure what happened. I heard about 9 gun shots and this is outside my house," the post says.

And then, about a month later, "Please not again. Anyone hear that? Near 21st ..."

Then there's the seemingly smaller concerns, the ones causing a creeping feeling of worry that crime is headed this way, like the 7-year-old who got a bike for his birthday and had it stolen hours later.

Or the person who had someone vault his fence to steal a ladder.

Or the man who was wanted in connection with a shooting going door to door

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## A NEIGHBORHOOD ON EDGE

Residents in these neighborhoods – roughly bordered to the west by 17th Street, the north by Market Street, the east by South 21st Street and the south by Castle Street – love their way of life, but they fret that violent crime is being pushed out of recent hot spots and into their corner of the world.



Charlie Blanton with his daughter Bernadette, 3, at Wilmington's Wallace Park. A spike in crime in the area – notably shootings – has put the Carolina Place-Ardmore neighborhood on edge. Photo by Mike Spencer

### VIOLENCE

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looking for somewhere to hide.

"It's to the point now where if we hear anything like a car door close, we jump up," said Kyle Grandin, who lives on Pender Avenue. "It's horrible, it's absolutely horrible."

Residents in these neighborhoods – roughly bordered to the west by 17th Street, the north by Market Street, the east by South 21st Street and the south by Castle Street – love their way of life, but they fret that the city's violent crime is being pushed out of recent hot spots and into their corner of the world.

"The police seem to be doing enforcement in high-crime areas and maybe it's helping, but at the same time it's driving it over here," said Charlie Blanton, president of the area's neighborhood association. "What we want the police to do is address the problem here."

Wilmington Police Department statistics show that much of the city's crime in 2013 happened in or near the Creekwood, Hillcrest and Houston Moore public housing areas. In response, the city worked with the Wilmington Housing Authority and the New Hanover County Sheriff's Office to expand its housing unit task force, created a dedicated gang unit and, said WPD Capt. Donny Williams, recently launched a gunfire prevention program to make officers visible in areas where statistics show gunfire is likely.

Blanton's and his neighbors' concerns sprouted when Joseph David Williams was shot in the back and killed while riding a moped last September on Forest Hills Drive, about a half mile from the 21st Street entrance to Carolina Place.

"We mark that day, and I think the media kind of does, too, as the day the violence was first noticeably spilling over," Blanton said.

Those concerns became more concrete late on April 27 when an 18-year-old was shot in the legs at 19th and Nun streets – the crime scene captured on the neighborhood's Facebook page. And they were solidified on Mother's Day, when people in two cars exchanged shots during a running gun battle in the 2100 block of Metts Avenue.

According to Wilmington Police Department crime data, offenses in the neighborhoods steadily rose from 167 crimes in 2009 to 257 in 2012, before falling back to 215 in 2013. Thefts were, by a wide measure, the most common crime during that five-year period, while violent crime has remained relatively steady.

### What life's like

Even the cats aren't shy in these neighborhoods, sauntering up to strangers and looking for a pat on the head or a treat instead of worrying about harm.

The area's residents are much the same, almost all willing to invite some-

### VIOLENT CRIMES

Violent crimes in the Carolina Place-Ardmore neighborhoods from 2010 through 2013:

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Murder	1	0	0	0
Rape	1	1	1	2
Robbery	3	5	5	6
Aggravated Assault	7	6	6	3

### NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

What: Carolina Place-Ardmore Neighborhood Association meeting with Wilmington Police Department and city of Wilmington officials to discuss crime in the area of Ardmore, Brookwood, Carolina Place, Chestnut Heights, Forest Hills and other nearby neighborhoods.

When: 6:30 p.m. today

Where: Temple Baptist, 1801 Market St.

one onto their porches and talk about how much they love living here, with this set of neighbors. When the mailman stops by some of these porches, he can, without hesitation, spot the homeowner, even if there's a crowd gathered.

"It's perfect. It's like you have a community, you have a family to your left and your right. We're like 'baby street' – we have six children three and younger just on this street," said Holly Wilcher, whose Pender Avenue front yard has a white picket fence, albeit one that comes up only to the knees and can easily be talked over.

Wilcher, who bought her house in the neighborhood about two years ago, said she and her husband both work off-site and could live anywhere in the world.

They picked Wilmington, which Wilcher knew from attending UNCW.

"We also wanted a specific neighborhood that was a community," Wilcher said.

So they picked Carolina Place.

### Peace of mind

Grandin is considering purchasing neighborhood watch signs with his own money and posting them just to make clear that residents are on the lookout for wrongdoing. Others are taking an even more proactive approach.

Ocean Prisleac, for instance, has rented several houses throughout the neighborhood during the past 10 years. At one point, Prisleac lived near Wallace Park, the same place Blanton takes his 3-year-old daughter to play, and confronted people when she sensed criminal behavior.

"I quit confronting because everyone's packing now," she said. "I just take pictures of their license plates."

Even though Prisleac doesn't send any of her photos to the police department, she takes some pleasure in putting a scare in people she says are casing houses and walking down the street tugging on car door handles.

Others, such as Wilcher, take to Facebook to let their neighbors know they should be on the lookout for suspi-

cious activity.

Formalizing the neighborhood watch program could help not only Carolina Place but every neighborhood, said the WPD officer who oversees the area.

"Residents have to do their part along with us, and that's the importance of community-oriented policing," Williams said. "It doesn't place all the responsibility on the police, it doesn't place it all on the residents, it doesn't place it all on the government."

The police department has started taking steps to make its presence felt more, Williams said.

In April, an officer dedicated solely to foot patrols was added to the north-west division, which covers the area north and west of Kerr Avenue, Shipyard Boulevard and Carolina Beach Road. WPD likely will add another officer to the foot patrols next month, Williams said, and another could follow shortly thereafter.

The first patrol officer's first day walking the beat was, coincidentally, he Monday after the shooting at 19th and Nun. "That foot beat officer was out there walking and talking and hearing things from residents," Williams said, adding that bike patrols could soon follow.

### Beyond the borders

Even as they begin to feel some pressure from the recent crimes, some residents of the Carolina Place and Ardmore neighborhoods are worried that spending more money on law enforcement there might only preserve the systemic problems that lead young people to criminal activity.

"I want prevention and promotion of positive alternatives for youth and for gang violence, and we are not taking the steps to do that," Wilcher said.

Specifically, Wilcher pointed to the area's perceived need for after-school and summer programs for school-age children.

Bree Peterson-Resnick grew up in the neighborhood – her mother still lives in Peterson-Resnick's childhood home – and watched its transformation from an aging neighborhood to a go-to spot for young families. Now, Peterson-Resnick runs Uprising, a bakery and gift shop at 1701 Wrightsville Ave.

While the neighborhood has improved since she was young, Peterson-Resnick still becomes uncomfortable when she sees what she describes as 5-, 6- and 7-year-old children wandering the streets alone.

"I know that happens, but that just blows my mind and is really unnerving," she said.

For Peterson-Resnick, fixing the city's gun violence problems would involve giving children and residents in other parts of town the same degree of pride and community that those in the Carolina Place and Ardmore neighborhoods have.

"It's like giving somebody a sense of hope," she said, "a sense of worth."