

L.A. saw a big drop in homicides this summer, falling to levels seen in 1966



After years of new crime-fighting strategies, the LAPD is seeing it pay off. (Sept. 13, 2017)



By **Kate Mather**

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Two years ago, a particularly brutal August — the deadliest the city had seen in years — alarmed Los Angeles police.

Hoping to slow the bloodshed, top officials at the Los Angeles Police Department retooled their crime-fighting strategies. They sent extra officers to the neighborhoods hit hardest, looking for guns and focusing on gang-inspired violence.

This summer, those changes finally paid off, Chief **Charlie Beck** said Tuesday.

L.A. saw a total of 59 homicides in June, July and August, Beck said — far lower than the number of killings typical for the three-month period. Other than 2014, when the city also recorded 59 homicides, it was the fewest killings in a single summer since 1966.

In recent years, the city's summer homicide tally typically was in the 70s or 80s, according to a review of LAPD data. A decade ago, there were 116 homicides during the summer. Last year, there were 82.

Beck told reporters that 59 homicides are “far too many.” But, he added, “that’s a pretty significant accomplishment for this city to have a summer that was that safe.”

The drop in killings was welcome news for the LAPD, which has been nagged by crime numbers that began creeping upward in 2014. Though the department worked steadily to reverse the trend — most notably by adding more officers to the elite Metropolitan Division and creating a command center to more quickly respond to violence in South L.A. — the numbers were slow to move.

This year, overall serious crime is up about 1.2% compared with the same period last year. But the city has seen a marked improvement in deadly violence, Beck said.

The chief pointed to two areas he said were the LAPD’s primary focus: the number of homicides and the number of people shot. Homicides dropped by 9% so far this year compared with this time in 2016, he said. Shooting victims fell by about 7%.

The summer bloodshed in 2015 was largely fueled by gang violence in South L.A., where 50 people were shot, 15 fatally, in the last two weeks of August alone. LAPD officials met with gang intervention workers, elected officials, clergy and community members, asking for help.

Those relationships stuck and have contributed to the decrease in violence seen there today, said Deputy Chief Phil Tingirides, who heads the LAPD’s South Bureau. He credited the community’s work, especially by those who have intervened when gang activity threatens to flare.

That, he said, along with the influx of Metro officers and the use of the LAPD’s command center, have helped drive down the violence from two summers ago.

“I’ve gotten more sleep at night than I have in a lot of years,” Tingirides said.

Many of the recent homicides have been connected to domestic disputes or people who knew one another — “not the typical gang-related homicides that we saw during that 15-day period of 2015,” he said.

The change is evident in the LAPD’s 77th Street Division, which typically sees some of the department’s highest numbers of killings and shootings. Homicides so far this year are flat, but the number of people shot has dropped significantly compared with the same period in 2016. As of Sept. 2, 134 people had been shot, 20 fewer than in 2016 and about 50 fewer than the year before.

Beck was quick to include gang intervention work and an increased number of domestic violence response teams with helping drive down violence. But, he acknowledged, “policing has a lot do to with it.”

The chief, however, delivered a word of caution to the city’s Police Commission after sharing the numbers Tuesday, saying the summer “will be difficult to replicate.”

A reminder of that came later in the day, when a shooting in the 9800 block of South San Pedro Street left one person dead.

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