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PARKS: ROWDY IS RELATIVE

Playland seasonal park rangers Wayne Nelson II, left, and Frank Podolax patrol Playland park in Rye.

CARUCHA L. MEUSE/
THE JOURNAL NEWS

POLICE ACTIVITY IN COUNTY PARKS

Police service logs for county parks in Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties revealed which parks had the most police activity in 2013. Mostly the police responded to mundane issues like animals, accidents or they were simply on patrol. The following county parks had the most activity in 2013:

PUTNAM COUNTY
33: Veterans Memorial Park, Carmel, no alleged crimes

ROCKLAND COUNTY
46: Haverstraw Bay Park, West Haverstraw, alleged crimes included one larceny, one fight and two criminal mischief

WESTCHESTER COUNTY
1,056: Playland, Rye, there were 58 alleged incidents of disruptive behavior and two alleged larcenies

County recreation areas virtually crime-free, say police; Many disturbances are disputes, small domestic issues

By Ernie Garcia
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Big crowds and thrill rides made Playland in Rye the region's rowdiest county park in last year.

Playland had 58 allegations of disturbances, domestic disputes and instances of disorderly behavior that led to police intervention, according to Westchester County Police service logs.

Yet rowdy is relative, said parks and police officials.

"They're usually small, domestic issues," said deputy parks commissioner Peter Tartaglia, who noted that about 400,000 people visited Playland last summer. "We always try to have logic prevail and ask people to calm down and sometimes they don't want to. These aren't big issues."

In fact, there were few alleged crimes in the region's county parks in 2013. For all last year, Westchester County's 51 parks logged 17 alleged larcenies, one assault and one burglary, according to Westchester County Police's park logs.

In Rockland, Kennedy-Dells County Park in New City had the most reports of alleged crimes, with six of them for marijuana use, criminal mischief, larceny and harassment. Putnam County's parks were virtually crime-free last year, with only the Tilly Foster Farm Conservation Area the scene of an alleged burglary and larceny report.

The police logs document public- and police-initiated service calls to the county parks, but they don't necessarily mean a crime has been committed. The



PETER CARR/THE JOURNAL NEWS

"I never had any issues here and even when it gets a little darker in the fall we still stay here after dark. There are still parents around."

GLENN KOLYER
of New City enjoys Kennedy-Dells Park in New City with his family Aug. 14.

PARKS: Crime rate low, say cops

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service calls can be routine patrols, 911 calls or suspicions that a crime may have been committed or is in progress.

The Journal News obtained 2013 and 2012 police service logs from Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties' law enforcement departments through a Freedom of Information Law request. The analysis did not include local parks operated by villages, towns and cities, which fall under the jurisdictions of local police.

Most police activity in the county parks had

"I think it's fair to say that if you treated the visitors to the park as a city it would be one of the lowest crime environments."

KIERAN O'LEARY,
Westchester County Police

nothing to do with crime or disruptive behavior. Instead, the police activity ranged from routine patrols, responses to accidents or animal complaints.

Playland has a police precinct on its premises, which besides the amusement park, includes a beach, boardwalk, public

ON THE WEB

To view a searchable database of Westchester County Police activity in Westchester County parks log on to <http://data.lohud.com/crime/countyparks/>

pool, conservation area and restaurant-bar. Police logged 1,056 service calls at Playland last year, excluding the Edith G. Read Wildlife Sanctuary, mostly for routine inspections, traffic stops, lost items and patron assistance.

"I think it's fair to say that if you treated the visitors to the park as a city it

would be one of the lowest crime environments," said Kieran O'Leary, the Westchester County Police's spokesman.

The Westchester County park with the most theft last year was Tibbetts Brook Park in Yonkers, which had five larcenies. Tartaglia said that when something goes missing at a park with a public pool, it's usually a cell phone.

Westchester County Police have a dedicated detail at Tibbetts in the summer and they patrol the pool area and the entrance, which is only open to county residents with identification.

Dave Rodriguez, 45, of Middletown, N.Y. visited Playland on Friday with two children and he said he's always felt safe in the 40 years he's visited Playland.

"It's a perfect place," said Rodriguez. "They have a little bit too many rangers in here, but maybe there's a reason for that. I don't know."

Amy Sutherland of the Little Friends day care center in Mount Vernon brought 12 of the children in her care to Playland Friday. Sutherland, a 30-year Playland patron, typically visits four times a season and she appreciated the visible police and ranger presence.

"It's very safe and you don't know who's who out in this world, so the protection is great," Sutherland said.

The Putnam County park that got the most police attention last year



CARUCHA L. MEUSE/THE JOURNAL NEWS
Amy Sutherland of Mount Vernon says she feels safe at Playland. Sutherland typically visits four times a season.



PETER CARR/THE JOURNAL NEWS
Cynthia Sakofsky walks her dog at Kennedy-Dells County Park in New City. The park had 40 police service calls last year.

was Veterans Memorial Park in Kent. Most of the police service calls to that park were for security checks and no crimes were reported.

Haverstraw Bay Park had the most police service calls last year, 46, for Rockland County. Much of that police activity, however, involved reports of open windows and doors in buildings and cars, not crimes.

Rockland County

Parks commissioner R. Allan Beers said security officers patrol Haverstraw Bay Park every day from opening to closing.

"It's such a high-use park, with that number of people you have to have people on the ground to make sure it's safe," said Beers.

In other Rockland County parks, rangers are on patrol and they have the authority to intercede if they see misbehavior. Kennedy-Dells County Park in New City had 40 police service calls last year, with six of the reports for criminal mischief, marijuana, larceny and harassment.

On Aug. 14 visitors to Kennedy-Dells expressed surprise that any misconduct happened there.

Jackie Grant, 42, of New City said she visits the park every day in the summer.

"I feel like it's safe. I come with the kids, I come with the dogs. I didn't even bring my phone with me. I'm not worried that anything is going to happen. In fact, we see a lot of staff here when we walk," said Grant.

Glenn Kolyer, 38, of New City said he visits the park about three times a week in the summer with his daughter and son.

"I never had any issues here," said Kolyer, "and even when it gets a little darker in the fall we still stay here after dark. There are still parents around."

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