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## Sheriff: Crime dropped 10 percent in rural Hidalgo County last year

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Crime dropped nearly 10 percent last year in rural parts of Hidalgo County.

Every category of crime tracked by the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program dropped in 2018, according to Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office data. Deputies handled just four murder cases, the lowest number during the past decade.

"Hidalgo County is one of the fastest growing areas of the state of Texas," said Sheriff J.E. "Eddie" Guerra, adding that more people often correlates with more crime. "But yet with more population we not only kept the crime in check, we also lowered the crime rate."

Guerra summarized the crime statistics Tuesday during the Hidalgo County Commissioners Court meeting in Edinburg.

Aggravated assault cases dropped nearly 16 percent from 2017 to 2018, according to Sheriff's Office data. Rape dropped nearly 13 percent. And robbery dropped nearly 1 percent — from 103 cases in 2017 to 102 cases in 2018.



Rural parts of Hidalgo County served by the Sheriff's Office had four murders last year, down from 23 in 2017.

Most murder cases result from domestic violence and street-level drug activity, Guerra said. The Sheriff's Office aggressively targets street-level dealers. Addressing domestic violence is more difficult.

The Sheriff's Office, though, plans to tackle the problem with a \$260,000 grant. Hidalgo County will provide an additional \$106,000 from forfeiture funds.

Grant money will pay four deputies and a victims assistance coordinator. They'll conduct follow-up visits after every domestic violence call, assisting victims with protective orders and referring them to appropriate resources.

"And just try to break that chain of domestic violence," Guerra said.

The Sheriff's Office also reported a significant decrease in property crime.

Auto theft cases dropped 19 percent. Burglary dropped nearly 13 percent. And theft, which accounted for more than half the total crimes tracked by the Uniform Crime Reporting Program, dropped nearly 6 percent.

Information sharing is key to reducing property crime, Guerra said. Deputies assigned to specialized units share information with patrol deputies, which allows them to quickly identify and arrest criminals.

"I think this past year we probably caught more burglars in progress than we've ever had," Guerra said. The 2018 crime statistics aren't an anomaly.

From 2010 to 2017, when the population of Hidalgo County increased from about 775,000 to nearly 861,000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of property crimes dropped every year.

The number of violent crimes also gradually decreased.

Despite the long-term drop in crime, border security rhetoric often paints the Rio Grande Valley as a dangerous place.

"I get frustrated," Guerra said, adding that some descriptions make Hidalgo County sound like the Wild West. "I'm the sheriff, and I'm going 'Well, where? What community are you talking about?' It's definitely not happening in our community. In any of our communities."

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