

Residents face prostitution woes - Police say they are focused on eradicating the problem.

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South Side resident Rosa Belmares says her neighborhood has become an embarrassment for her and her 19-year-old daughter, Stella.

"I can't walk down the street," she said. "I can't tell my friends that I live in the area." The problem is prostitution, she said. Belmares has lived in the 100 block of Linda Lou near the 4600 block of South Presa for about 18 years. She is one of several area residents who are asking for help from their elected officials and the San Antonio Police Department in dealing with pimps, prostitutes and their customers whom they say have run rampant in the neighborhood for decades. The area in question covers about five blocks along South Presa from Fairview Avenue to East Southcross Boulevard. That part of South Presa is home to a number of motels where prostitutes gather, residents said. None of the motel operators returned telephone calls to the San Antonio Express-News. "They (prostitutes) are always there on the corner pretending that they are on the (pay) telephone or waiting for the bus," Belmares said. "My daughter goes to school by bus, and the men are always trying to talk to her and they bother her. It is scary for us." Business also is done in parked cars, in alleys and even in front of homes, residents add. Belmares said her concerns are representative of what many area residents are feeling. While area residents see what they interpret as a lack of attention by authorities, city and SAPD officials say they are responding to the problem. "We're out there

constantly," said Sonya Domingues, SAPD vice unit director. "That is a prostitution hot spot, and we have our detectives out there. Obviously, for the safety of our officers, we can't tell (the residents) when we're out there." Police officials added that prostitution in the area ebbs and flows, but prostitutes and their customers should know SAPD vice officers are in the area. Domingues added that from January to the first week in July, 224 arrests or cases were made citywide for prostitution activities. "We do occasional sting operations," she said. "We're out there." More recently, District 2 Councilman Ron Segovia said that in the past two weeks the police have handed out 30 citations in that area. ***SEE CORRECTION*** He said prostitution in that area has come to his attention and he's working to put on the pressure. "We got to keep hitting it," Segovia said. "It's unfortunate that they have customers out there. But the problem is being addressed." Domingues said it's important for residents to continue to stay involved and help police fight the problem. "We're more than happy to work with them," she said. econchas@express-news.net

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Date: July 30, 2003

Page: 1H

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