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Newsday (USPS# 388-760) (ISSN# 0278-5587) is published daily except Sunday and Christmas Day by Newsday LLC, 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, N.Y. 11747. Periodicals postage paid at Huntington Station, N.Y. Postmaster: Send address changes to 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, N.Y. 11747.

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Inside ExploreLI

TOP STORIES

LI CRIME TAKES A

Reductions in Nassau and Suffolk include large drop in gang violence

BY NICOLE FULLER
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Crime decreased to historic lows across Long Island over the past year, including a dramatic drop in the number of killings attributed to MS-13 gang violence, police reported.

Four of the homicides recorded on the Island in 2018 appear to be connected to MS-13, compared to the 14 killings — eight in Nassau and six in Suffolk — that were the work of the street gang in 2017, police said.

In Nassau, major crime, which includes murder, rape, burglary and robbery, fell 28.6 percent over the past five years, according to police statistics. Similarly, Suffolk saw its violent crime, which includes murder, rape, robbery and felony assault, drop 28 percent since 2014.

Suffolk County Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart said the decreases in crime this year were due to the department's concentration on data and intelligence, and using that information to more efficiently deploy officers and specialty teams to areas where crimes are likely to happen or have already occurred.

She also credited the department's collaboration with federal law enforcement and its efforts in building stronger community relationships, pointing to the hiring of a part-time civilian liaison to increase outreach to the county's Latino residents.

"The lion's share of the credit goes to the men and women of the department, who are taking every opportunity to partner with our communities," Hart, who became commissioner in April, said in an interview.

Nassau Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder was unavailable for an interview to discuss crime statistics because he was planning a news conference in early January to publicly announce the numbers, said Det. Lt. Richard LeBrun, a department spokesman.

Nassau County recorded 16 homicides this year, compared with 15 homicides in 2017. Suffolk recorded 21 homicides this year, a decrease from 22 in 2017.

Two of the Nassau killings this year were actually committed in 2017 but the bodies were discovered in 2018 and are recorded in this year's homicide statistics, LeBrun said. Three of the 2018 killings were attributed to gang violence, including the two that were committed in 2017, which are connected to MS-13, police said.

The Dec. 18 fatal shooting of Harold B. Sermeno, 17, whose body was found behind the Five Towns Community Center in Lawrence, appears to be connected to MS-13, according to an NYPD official. LeBrun declined to comment on the investigation.

Eight of Nassau's 2018 homicides were the result of gunshot injuries, six were stab wounds and two were from blunt force trauma, police said. Two of Suffolk's homicides this year occurred in previous years, police said, including a 2016 killing. Only one homicide is linked to MS-13 violence, Hart said. In April, the remains of Cesar Rivera, 29, who disappeared in October 2015, were found by the FBI in Babylon Village. Hart said police believe he was killed in 2015.

Two other 2018 homicides have a possible gang connection, but not to MS-13, Hart said. Ten of Suffolk's 21 homicides were caused by gunshot wounds and four were stab wounds while two victims were killed by assailants using their hands and one through blunt force trauma, police reported. Four others were categorized as "homicidal violence," police said.

In Nassau, total crime is



Suffolk Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart said that the reduced

	Suffolk County crime stats, as of Dec. 25		Nassau County crime stats, as of Dec. 26	
	2017	2018	2017	2018
Homicides	22	21	15	16
Residential burglary	874	580	505	430
Commercial burglary	541	366	387	364
Motor vehicle theft	978	863	449	428

SUFFOLK AND NASSAU POLICE DEPARTMENTS

down 6.3 percent this year, with 24,264 crimes reported through Dec. 26, compared with the 25,909 reported through the end of 2017, according

to department statistics. Street robberies were down 23.3 percent, from 261 in 2017 to 200 this year. Commercial robberies dropped 16.4 percent

DIVE: POLICE



violence is due to an increase in the use of wiretaps and warrants.

from 152 in 2017 to 127 this year, Nassau police reported.

Residential burglaries decreased 14.8 percent from 505 in 2017 to 430 this year, Nassau police said. Commercial burglaries fell 5.9 percent to 364 this year, from the 387 last year.

Felony assaults in Nassau fell 11.5 percent this year when 377 were recorded, compared to 426 in 2017. Motor vehicle theft fell 4.6 percent from 449 in 2017 to 428 this year, according to police data.

Suffolk police recorded decreases in all crime categories in 2018 through Dec. 25, with both violent crime and property crime down 11.9 percent this year when it recorded a total of 16,180 compared to

18,359 in 2017, according to statistics provided by the department. Violent crime alone dropped 22.5 percent.

Robberies in Suffolk are down 21.2 percent, with 371 this year, compared with 471 in 2017, police reported. Aggravated assaults decreased 19.5 percent, from 862 in 2017 to 694 this year.

Burglaries were down 33.1 percent, with 1,415 last year compared to 946 in 2018. Larceny was down 8.7 percent from the 14,482 in 2017 to 13,221 this year. Motor vehicle thefts in Suffolk, with 978 recorded in 2017 and 863 this year, were down 11.8 percent, police said.

"These are dramatic reductions off of already historically

low numbers," Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone said.

Hart attributed the decrease in violence to the department's use of wiretaps to target gangs and narcotics traffickers and search warrants, which are up 207 percent over the last three years. This year, 276 search warrants were issued compared with 90 in 2015, Hart said.

The crime decreases on Long Island mirror the national trend of decreasing crime. The Brennan Center for Justice at NYU's School of Law forecasts crime in the country's 30 largest cities will fall in 2018, according to a late December analysis.

The overall crime rate in the 30 largest cities, including New York City, in 2018 is estimated to decline slightly from the previous year, falling by 1.8 percent, a figure that will represent the lowest since at least 1990, the analysis shows.

The murder rate in the 30 largest cities is estimated to decline by nearly 6 percent, according to the report, with decreases in the number of homicides even in some of the most violent big American cities such as Baltimore and Chicago.

Joseph Giacalone, an adjunct professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan and a retired NYPD sergeant, said the investment in technology such as license plate readers and other video surveillance has served as a major factor in crime decreases on Long Island.

In the past, a single serial robber could drive up the numbers in a crime category, but with the proliferation of cameras, they generally are apprehended a lot sooner, Giacalone said.

Police should be applauded for making inroads against MS-13, but they must remain vigilant, he said.

"One thing in policing, you can never really take a victory lap," Giacalone said. "You're always one incident away from being the focus of the community saying, 'what are you doing here?'"

Garage open after repairs

BY TED PHILLIPS

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The Hicksville commuter parking garage reopens Monday after being closed for more than three months for repairs, Town of Oyster Bay officials said Sunday.

Alternative parking and shuttle service between the former Sears parking lot and the Hicksville Long Island Rail Road station will continue through Jan. 11 as part of a transition process, town spokesman Brian Nevin said Sunday.

The town closed the garage and its 1,441 spaces Sept. 12 for \$15.5 million in repairs to cracked concrete and leaking roofs that have been a problem at the heavily used facility since it opened in 2011. The town has provided alternative parking and shuttle services to commuters.

The garage will be open from 5 a.m. to midnight on weekdays and close on holidays and weekends, officials said. The exit gates will be left open on New Year's Day, town spokeswoman Marta Kane said in an email, allowing New Year's Eve celebrants to retrieve their vehicles after normal closing hours.

Town officials said earlier this month that the garage would resume operations the first week of 2019, but by opening Dec. 31, the town will meet an end-of-year deadline set by Supervisor Joseph Saladino at an August town board meeting.

In a news release Sunday,

Saladino thanked commuters for their patience.

"The Town of Oyster Bay will close out 2018 on a high note with the successful reopening of the Hicksville Commuter Parking Garage," he said in the release.

The town board awarded a \$13.9 million contract to Swedesboro, New Jersey-based Pullman SST Inc. for the repairs, but earlier this month approved an additional \$1.6 million for changes to the original work. Some additional work included changes to the design because of inconsistencies in existing concrete slabs compared to original design drawings, changes to the fire alarm system to bring it up to code, and changes to the electrical lighting system, according to backup material to the board resolution that authorized the additional funds.

Last year, the town sued Freeport-based Peter Scalamanre & Sons Inc. and Mineola-based Sidney B. Bowne & Son LLP, alleging the companies failed to correct substandard work on the garage. The companies in court filings denied they had done anything improper.

In the latest legal filings, Scalamanre and the town disputed the date on which the work was completed. That date could determine the lawsuit's future because of a six-year statute of limitations for breach of contract cases, according to legal filings.



The parking garage at the Long Island Rail Road's Hicksville station, shown here in April, is open after more than three months of repairs.