

Sparks watches over neighborhood

By CHERYL WILLIAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

If you visit Peggy Sparks of 3311 Heitman Drive, the first thing she'll do after saying hello is direct you to her television.

"I'm real proud of it," Mrs. Sparks said, pointing not to the set but a certificate on top of it.

The certificate, the Citizens Commendation Award from the Winston-Salem Police Department, praises Mrs. Sparks for organizing Community Watch programs on several streets in her neighborhood.

Part of the certificate reads: "The Winston-Salem Police Department gives this certificate of appreciation for special and commendable services above and beyond the ordinary duty of a citizen which was rendered to the Crime Prevention Unit of the Neighborhood Watch Program."

After reading the certificate, take a seat and be prepared to watch a little television. Just as she is proud of her certificate, Mrs. Sparks is equally proud of her cameo appearance on a local news station that covered the certificate presentation. She said her family videotaped the newscast.

But stardom on the little screen or no, Mrs. Sparks continues her work. It's not an uncommon sight to see this 44-year-old white woman going through this predominantly black neighborhood knocking on doors and telling people about Neighborhood Watch.

Pulling out a notebook that outlines her work strategy, Mrs. Sparks, who is chairman of the Neighborhood Watch program on her street, said that so far she has helped organize Neighborhood Watch programs on Nancy Lane and Leona and Charles streets.

A watch program has existed on her street for several years, Mrs. Sparks said. She was part of that organizing effort, too.

She said involvement in the Neighborhood Watch program on her street had tapered off to only a few meetings over the years. But a break-in in a nearby house in May prompted Mrs. Sparks to renew her efforts to getting the community organized.

Mrs. Sparks introduces people to the program by going through the phone book to find the people living on the streets she wants to organize.

"It took me days," she said. She said that addresses and names she can't find in the phone book don't bother her. She just goes to the house and introduces herself.

She holds meetings at Mount Carmel Baptist Church on Heitman Drive, where Crime Prevention Officer O.G. Bruce shows films on how to secure one's home against crime.

Mrs. Sparks said she announces her meetings through word-of-mouth and by putting up posters in the community.

Attendance at the meetings varies, Mrs. Sparks said, but she can always count on one person to attend.

"I haven't had a meeting yet that my alderman, Larry Womble, hasn't been to," she said. "That makes me feel good."

While the other streets are being organized, people often call Mrs. Sparks with questions.

"They call me up and ask me things like where to go to get signs to put in their yards," she said.

When she moved into her neighborhood 20 years ago with her husband, Larry, it was all-white, Mrs. Sparks said.

She doesn't remember when blacks started moving in, she said, but neither does she care.

Unlike many whites, Mrs. Sparks and her family chose to remain in the neighborhood. Mrs. Sparks said that, at the time, her house was almost paid for and she saw no reason to move.

"I can get along with anybody as long as they behave themselves," she said.

Mrs. Sparks said she has found the blacks in the neighborhood as



Peggy Sparks, a watchful neighbor, has organized three Neighborhood Watch programs in her community (photo by James Parker).

"nice as they can be."

"I would want no better neighbors," she said. "Doing this Community Watch, I want the blacks to feel like I'm trying to help them as much as the whites."

Mrs. Sparks, a housewife, said she spends all her time between her Community Watch organizing efforts and her family. She

and her husband have one daughter, Teresa, who is 17 years old.

Mrs. Sparks doesn't get paid for her work in the community, but she said knowing she's helping someone is compensation enough.

She said that one night recently a woman called wanting some ad-

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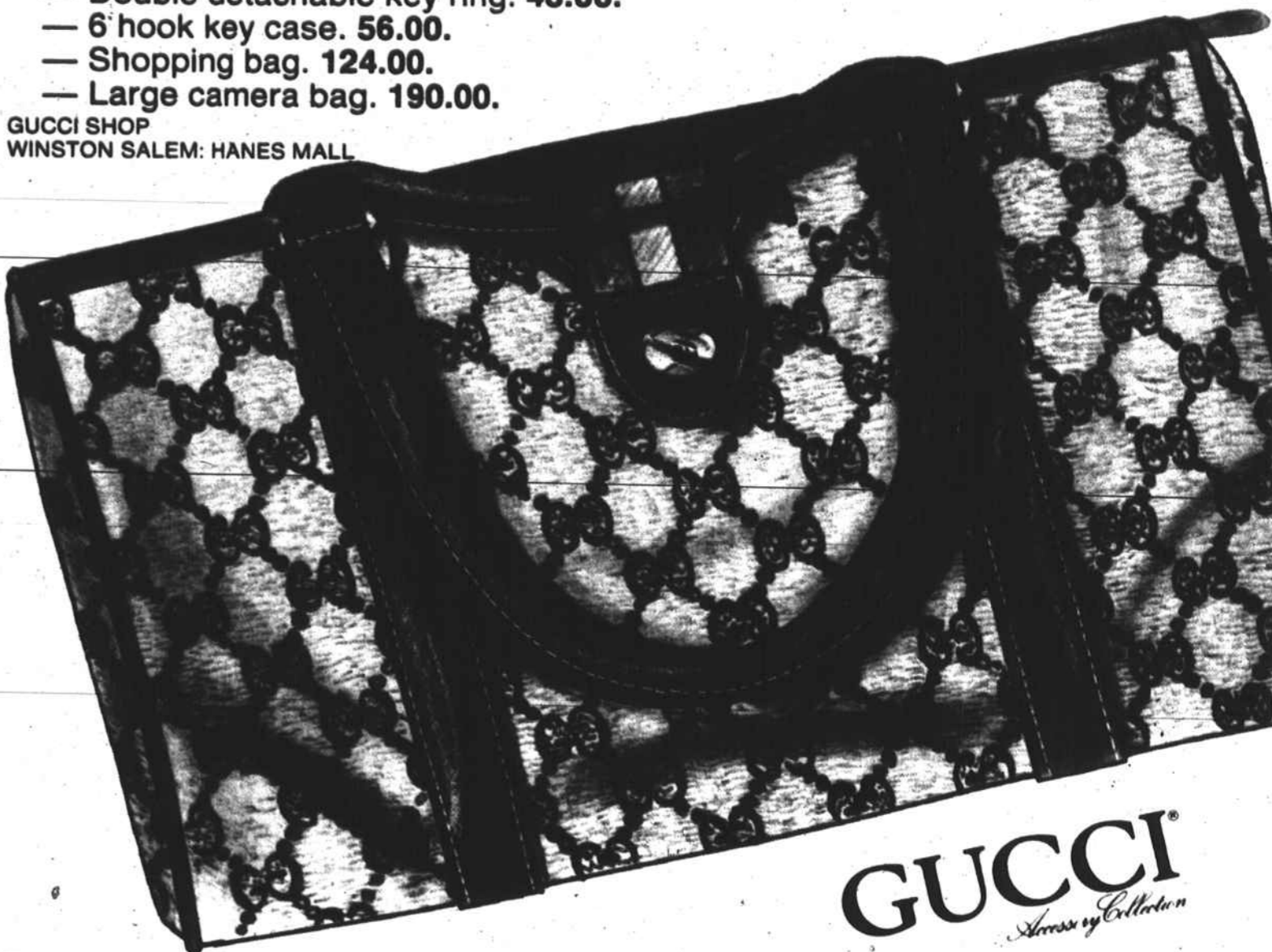
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