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**SIDE STREETS
WHO WE ARE**



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Planner forges truce for parking near UCCS

After 50-some years of peaceful living in Cragmor, Mary Simon said everything in the little neighborhood on the side of Austin Bluffs started deteriorating.

The cause?

A daily deluge of cars parked against every inch of curb by students and staff at the nearby University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

Each weekday during the school year, hundreds of cars swamped Cragmor, blocking mailboxes and driveways and making it difficult for residents to get around. Even worse were the cars that circled constantly, stalking an empty space and sometimes making wild U-turns and racing to a vacant curb.

It has been a subject of several Side Streets columns in recent years as UCCS enrollment soared — the university now has about 10,600 students. With each surge in enrollment came more cars and neighbors became more frustrated.

They couldn't get in and out of their driveways. Friends had nowhere to park when they came to visit. Strangers wandered through the neighborhood day and night.

"It was terrible and going downhill fast," said Mary, 89. Since moving here in 1959, when she and her husband came from Wichita, Kan., to work at the new Air Force Academy, Mary has seen

Cragmor change from a dirt-street, unincorporated subdivision into a family-friendly place to raise kids to an older neighborhood in transition with rowdy college students living in rental party houses.

For years, the city balked at creating a parking permit system. Similar systems in Denver and Boulder around universities and hospitals and sports stadiums protect residents in nearby neighborhoods. It would be too expensive to administer, the city said.

And UCCS said it couldn't control its students and staff, noting it regularly encouraged them to take advantage of free parking and shuttles.

Finally, as complaints intensified and the park-

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ing problem spread deeper into Cragmor, folks at City Hall relented and the task of negotiating a parking truce fell to Tim Roberts, a senior transportation planner for Colorado Springs.

After months of meetings, Roberts implemented his permit plan this month. Now, he's a hero to Simon and her neighbors.

"It's heavenly," she said Thursday, noting how quiet Cragmor is once again, now that it's mostly free of university commuter traffic.

"I really appreciate Tim Roberts and all the work he did," Mary told me. "He worked hard to please everybody."

Roberts spent months holding large neighborhood meetings, smaller meetings and working with folks in City Hall to come up with a permit program that would satisfy the folks living in Cragmor, a community of about 3,500 modest 1950s-era bungalows, many with one-car garages.

Not everyone is happy. Some students and staff are angry. They argue that, as taxpayers, they were entitled to park on city streets. The permit system is unfair. And they blame the university for not providing enough parking.

"Change is hard," said Tom Hutton, UCCS spokesman. "We had some students who weren't very happy. But it seems to have calmed down now."

Roberts' parking permit

program was implemented after Labor Day, and violators received warnings until Sept. 16 when cops started hitting windshields with \$50 tickets.

"I can enjoy sitting on my front porch again," Mary said as she marveled at the empty pavement in both directions. "It's unbelievable how noisy it was. It was terrible to have cars lined up in front of your house so thick, coming and going all day long.

"It's been pretty quiet lately, and I am so appreciative."

Roberts said UCCS worked closely with the city to get word out to students about the end of free parking in Cragmor. Word went out in pre-semester orientation meetings, in newsletters, emails and on social media.

But it was probably the \$50 tickets that were the key to compliance, Roberts said.

Another key, Hutton said, was UCCS providing 1,000 free parking spaces at its Four Diamonds Complex on North Nevada Avenue and 11 free shuttles to campus to compensate for the lost parking in Cragmor. UCCS has 5,195 parking spaces.

"We are doing more shuttles," Hutton said, noting ridership is up 40 percent this year over last. "We anticipated this and over the summer we purchased another shuttle bus."

Things will further improve next spring when UCCS will open a 1,227-space garage on campus, Hutton said.

Conditions also will improve for folks who live on Palm Drive and Rimwood Drive and a couple of smaller streets northeast of UCCS in an area called Cragmor



PHOTOS BY BILL VOGRIN, THE GAZETTE

Tim Roberts, a senior transportation planner for Colorado Springs, is a hero to Mary Simon and her Cragmor neighbors for figuring out a solution to the parking problems near UCCS.

North.

Residents there also have called me complaining of unwanted student and staff parking. And Roberts wants them to know he has heard their complaints.

"We'll do what we did with Cragmor South," Roberts said, describing meetings he'll hold in coming weeks. His plan is to reach a consensus with everyone involved on a solution — likely the creation of another parking permit zone.

"My goal is to get it implemented before the spring semester," Roberts said. No doubt Roberts' hero status will only grow.

Read my blog updates at blogs.gazette.com/sidestreets.



UCCS worked hard to get the word out about the end of free parking in the Cragmor neighborhood.