

Dorchester woman makes neighborhood safe for all

By Brian Ballou

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When she gets off her part-time job, Jacquie De Costa goes to work on the crime and blight that plagues her neighborhood, and becomes the go-to person for many Hispanic residents.

"I think I'm just one of those people who know how to advocate," said De Costa, 43, standing outside the well-manicured 38-unit Alexander Magnolia housing development in the Uphams Corner section of Dorchester.

"We're happy here and we want to continue being happy, but we realize there has to be participation by the community for that to happen." De Costa, the vice president of the development's board, has been actively involved, meeting with elected officials and city representatives to address troubling issues in her neighborhood.

When children at play were put in danger by speeding cars, she led the campaign to get stop signs posted at the top of her street. And when drug dealing and prostitution were rampant, she helped organize a neighborhood watch to rid the area of the activity. Her latest task involves the cleanup of a litter-strewn vacant lot on her street.

De Costa has lived in the development since it was built 11 years ago. "A lot has changed around here. Sometimes I hear from residents who were here before, and they tell me that they would have never moved out if they knew the area would look the way it does today."

De Costa, who is fluent in Spanish, also serves as a translator for many people in the community and meets three times a week with senior citizens. De Costa became a foster mother recently and will take custody of a toddler within the coming days. "I have the time and space and the patience."