

Pirate's Cove Ranks Worst in Crime Among 12 Popular College Apartment Complexes

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It was a typical Saturday night back in 2004. Brandon Qualls cracked open a cold beer, slid open the patio door, and stepped out onto his private balcony on his third floor apartment. As he reached to turn up the volume on his stereo, he heard arguing from the unit above him.

“The usual drunk banter,” he muttered to himself as he leaned back in his chair.

However, curiosity had set in. Qualls knew most of his neighbors, so beer in hand, he walked up the corridor stairs to the fourth floor. He may never forget what happened next.

“A white male pointed a gun in my face, told me to go back downstairs, and not call the cops,” explains Qualls. He did in fact call the cops, and started re-evaluating his living options. Qualls was a resident at Pirate's Cove apartments in Greenville.

Pirate's Cove is no stranger to crime, however. A complex that offers a pool, multiple tennis courts and houses an estimated 660 residents, Pirate's Cove is also home to the most crime reported among 12 apartment complexes catering to students, according to Greenville Police Department crime reports. The crime reports analyzed for comparison included armed robbery, arson, assault, larceny, breaking and entering, burglary, rape, sexual assault and gunshots heard by residents. Pirate's Cove had a total of 238 reported crimes—that's more than one crime for every three residents in the complex, on average, over the 2005 to 2007 time frame.

An analysis of serious crimes and the expected number of occupants at each of the 12 complexes reveals that Pirate's Cove is the least safe, with a 37.5 percent crime rate for its number of occupants.

One of the "safest" apartments in the analysis is the relatively new North Campus Crossing, which boasts a gated entry and 24-hour security patrol. However, it opened in mid-2006, about halfway through the three-year period analyzed.

The competition is steep for apartment complexes in Greenville targeting the college demographic. Many even offer lease-signing bonuses such as free rent and cash. On its Web site, Pirate's Cove claims to be "home to the \$1,000 Visa gift card." Sign a lease with Pirate's Cove and receive free stuff. It's as simple as that.

Owned by College Park Communities, the student housing division of the billion-dollar company, GMH Communities, Pirate's Cove is just one of 85 student housing complexes across the country owned by GMH.

"Feel the Love. Live the Life." The slogan headlines the Pirate's Cove mission statement. It was that carefree, resort-like mantra that first attracted Danny Santos to the complex. "I have lived in Pirate's Cove for three years now," says Santos. "The apartments are furnished, there is Internet access, and a pool across the street." Santos, a local restaurant manager, moved into Pirate's Cove after a stint in the military, and liked the fact there were many other non-students living there.

"Pirate's Cove takes the well-being of its residents very seriously and is committed to creating a safe and secure environment for residents. We have a number of security enhancements on-site, including various security procedures and policies that are actively monitored by property management," Pirate's Cove officials said in a 2008 statement.

Complex officials also said that they have employed four Greenville police officers to run security patrols on the property, and also have hired a private patrol officer to make sure that Pirate's Cove is safe.

However, Santos has seen his fair share of crime while residing in his fourth floor apartment. "My previous roommate was mugged last year and had to be hospitalized. I have seen groups of guys attack other guys, car break-ins, and have heard about many apartment break-ins," states Santos.

Fortunately, Santos has never fallen victim to crime in the past three years, and neither has his current roommate, Jason Sierra. Sierra, a part-time student and a medical equipment sales rep, moved to Pirate's Cove in May from Tar River Apartments. "The rent was cheaper here, but now I am having second thoughts about living in Pirate's Cove," explains Sierra.

Less than half a mile down the road from Pirate's Cove lies Eastgate Village, which had almost one-tenth of the reported crimes that Pirate's Cove sported, and 30 percent less crime. The complex is called "home" by an estimated 423 people, but had only 26 reported crimes over three years, just a 6 percent crime rate.

"I'm not surprised Eastgate Village has so little crime," said Arturo Cummings, an Eastgate Village resident. "I feel totally safe living here. The management takes it personally upon themselves to make sure that the residents in this complex are safe."

Eastgate Village's management had no comment.

Among apartment complexes analyzed that were open for the entire three year period studied, the lowest number of crimes reported in Greenville apartments that cater to students are two cross-town residences: Wyndam Apartments and the Exchange. Both of

these reported only 14 of the analyzed crimes over the three years the Police Department gathered data.

“We tell our residents about locking doors, securing their windows and keeping the radio and TV on when they leave,” said Mike Gibson, manager of Pinnacle Property Management, the owner of Wyndham Apartments.

“We have an overall attitude of safety, kind of like the [old] ‘neighborhood watch system.’”

Gibson also said that the lighting at the complexes contributes to the overall safety of residents.

Safety is also a top priority for ECU’s Center for Off-Campus and Community Living. The center, which includes Pirate’s Cove in its listing of complexes for students to consider, provides facts and tips about safety and off-campus living.

“Before we list an apartment on our Web site, we make sure it is inspected by the Greenville City code inspector to ensure that the apartment is following all safety regulations,” says Lucia Brannon, a representative for the Division of Student Affairs.

While Pirate’s Cove may be up to safety standards according to ECU, Qualls is not taking a second look.

“After my lease term was up, I bought a house in a family neighborhood,” says Qualls.

“I’d rather pay a little more money to feel safe.”