A BRIEF HISTORY OF BAYTOWN CRIME STOPPERS, INC.

The Crime Stoppers concept originated in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1976. Greg MacAleese, an Albuquerque police officer, developed the idea, which was adopted by the police department there and evolved into the Crime Stoppers program copied by many other communities across the nation.

The key to the success of Crime Stoppers is its inclusion of the public, the media, and the police in a coordinated fight against crime. Crime Stoppers offers anonymity and cash rewards to persons who furnish information leading to the arrest and indictment of criminals accused of felony crime offenses and to the capture of fugitives. Anonymity overcomes fear of involvement—cash overcomes apathy.

In late 1980, Baytown Police Chief Bo Turner was discussing the Crime Stoppers program with Jean Shepherd at a City Council meeting. He told Jean that he wished something like that program could be started in Baytown. Jean, a local citizen known for her efforts to protect local neighborhoods, was the chairperson of the Chamber of Commerce’s Legislative Affairs Committee. After receiving the information on the success of Crime Stoppers elsewhere, the committee overwhelmingly voted to form an independent Baytown Crime Stoppers group. On March 9, 1981, Baytown Crime Stoppers, Inc. was incorporated as a local non-profit corporation and was approved as a 501(c)(3) organization so that donations to it are tax deductible.

At the first meeting of Baytown Crime Stoppers, Inc. in March 1981, Charles Tillery was elected chairman. Other officers elected at that time were: Vice-Chairman, Wayne Gray; Secretary, Joy Ralls; Treasurer, Jay Eshbach.

The initial board members were Bob Gillette, Lanell Stuart, Jim Ferris, R. K. Carter, Clyde Messiah, Ron Smith, Towson Ellis, Dr. Nofal Musfy, Jack Strickler, Leon Brown, Jess Navarre, Wayne Gray, Geraldine Bara, Dottie Tickner, Peggy Rutherford, Hugh Wood, Don Northrup, and Glen Walker. One of the first acts of Baytown Crime Stoppers was to adopt the telephone number 427-TIPS as the hotline call-in number for anonymous tipsters to use.

427-TIPS received its first call on March 28, 1981. Detective Gene Sutton made the first arrest from a Crime Stoppers tip on April 22, 1981. The report describing the felony read, “Henry Silas Killian III was charged with felony theft in connection with the Saturday night theft of 38 rabbits from Leola Greer’s yard.” Since that first arrest, Baytown Crime Stoppers has received tips leading to arrests involving not only felony thefts, but robberies, burglaries, narcotics sales, assaults, and murder. Since inception of the program, Baytown Crime Stoppers has received over 8,000 tips that resulted in nearly 2,000 arrests that cleared over 200 offenses. Over $3 million in property, cash, and narcotics has been recovered or seized as a result of Crime Stoppers tips, and nearly 600 fugitives captured using information provided by tips given to Baytown Crime Stoppers. During the thirty-year plus history of Baytown Crime Stoppers, it has approved nearly a half-million dollars in rewards. Compared to property, cash, and drugs recovered, this is a 6 to 1 payback, without considering the benefit of all the criminals taken off the streets.

A few years after its creation, Baytown Crime Stoppers expanded its impact through its support and sponsorship of school Crime Stoppers programs in the local school district. The three high schools and several of the junior schools have Crime Stoppers clubs that operate within each campus with boards, made up of students who supervise the program under direction of faculty members, and are responsible for fundraising activities that provide reward money to tipsters. While the crime at which those programs aim is primarily the typical juvenile crime one might expect, tips by students to the campus programs have resulted not only in confiscation of drugs being brought into the schools, but also at least one gun.

A major development affecting Baytown Crime Stoppers was the approval of a statute by the Texas Legislature in the 1990s that allowed Criminal Court judges to require defendants convicted of crime and placed on probation to pay an amount to the local Crime Stopper programs. As the cities of Houston and Baytown are the only two certified Crime Stoppers programs in Harris County eligible to receive those funds, Baytown Crime Stoppers receives a share of the fees assessed by the Harris County courts. Even though Baytown receives a much smaller share than the Houston program, it is still a significant amount that allowed Baytown Crime Stoppers to raise its maximum award amount to $5,000 in 2011.

Since the origination of the program, Baytown Crime Stoppers has taken advantage of new technology to encourage tips. A tipster can still call 281-427-TIPS or leave an anonymous tip on the Baytown Police Department website, [http://www.baytown.org/ content/crimestoppers](http://www.baytown.org/content/crimestoppers). Recently, Baytown Crime Stoppers has implemented a system that allows a caller to leave an anonymous telephone text tip. Anyone with information regarding a felony crime can report that information by texting Baytown + *your message* to “Crimes (274367)”.

Baytown Crime Stoppers is one of more than 230 Crime Stoppers programs that utilize an answering service known as Alternative Answers. Based in Toronto, Canada, the firm was founded by Donna Harms over 15 years ago. The advent of call forwarding enabled her to take calls from anywhere in the world, so before long she was handling all of the Crime Stoppers calls in Ontario, then all across Canada and in the U.S. and other countries. The service is able to accept calls, emails, and texts. The company has 27 call-takers working in shifts answering phone, email, and text tips around the clock 24 hours a day. Alternative Answers guarantees privacy and anonymity for each tip. With each new tip, the call-takers open up a template specific to the type of call, extract as much information as possible from the tipster, enter it into the computer, and forward the tip, no matter how trivial it may be, electronically to the appropriate Crime Stoppers unit.

Donations to Baytown Crime Stoppers, including school programs, are tax deductible and can be made to Baytown Crime Stoppers at any time and mailed to PO Box 491, Baytown, TX 77522.