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City still is one of the most livable

By CHRISTINE L. PETERSON
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HUNTINGTON BEACH — Despite recent reports of gang activity and a stabbing blamed on racism, the city continues to garner awards for being a good place to live.

This week's two Helen Putnam honors are for a branch library and literacy program in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood and for an efficient, revenue-generating ambulance program.

During his presentation of the honors Thursday, Gov. Pete Wilson mentioned only two cities in the state as examples to others in combating gang violence — Huntington Beach and San Mateo.

Wilson commended the city's ability to implement effective lo-

cal government. The city uses enforcement and prevention to combat gangs.

Police spokesman Mike Kelly said the department credits its success in part to community-oriented policing, where citizens collaborate with police to solve problems at the neighborhood level. That form of policing has worked in the Oak View neighborhood, Kelly said, in concert with the literacy program and strict code enforcement.

Mayor Dave Sullivan said the library award complements the diversity of the city and the benefits of working together. The Ocean View School District sold the land to the city for \$1 to build the library, and now children and adults benefit from the literacy program.

"It's really a successful effort. The pressure of joining gangs is there," Sullivan said. "They are trying to show there is a real benefit to education. It's really nice

to have a program like that when you stack that up against the skinhead problem, which we are dealing with."

City officials admit the city is not perfect, but they say antisocial incidents tend to attract more attention to the city than all the good news.

"Whenever you get an award, it's always a two-edged sword," Kelly said in regard to police activity. "You like the recognition, but it challenges you."

In response to the Feb. 3 stabbing of an American Indian, allegedly by a skinhead, the City Council this week voted unanimously to establish a human relations task force to deal with social problems as they arise.

The council this week also established a task force — including police, code enforcement officers and representatives of the city attorney's office — to deal with so-called gang houses.