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U.S. Attorney's
Office
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5400 Federal Plaza
Suite 1500
Hammond, IN 46320
219.937.5500

David Capp
Acting U.S. Attorney

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POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

Gang Violence Trends Up in America

08/13/2007 Washington, DC | Last year, murders were up a disturbing 6.7 percent in cities with a million or more residents. Additionally, according to the FBI, there were more than 670,000 assaults with firearms between 2001 and 2005. "If you ask people what was the reason for violence in the '90s, it was almost universally crack cocaine. Today it is much more complicated than that," said Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum.

"What we are seeing today is the re-emergence of a number of key factors," Wexler said. "You have gangs out there. You have a higher percentage of juveniles. You have over 600,000 people coming out of prison and you've got a lot of guns out on the street, higher-level guns, all coming together in a combustible mixture."

Recent crimes across the United States, in addition to the murders in Newark, illustrate the problem. In Oakland, Calif., a newspaper editor was fatally shot Aug. 2, just before a bloody weekend in which seven other people were killed in gunfire. Philadelphia is surging toward a 10-year high in homicides.

Florida's Orange County had a record-breaking 121 murders last year. The violence continues at nearly the same pace in 2007. Many communities across the country are wrestling with chronic, sustained carnage, often by repeat offenders.

"I had two deputies shot and the three individuals involved had 88 total arrests," Orange County Sheriff Kevin Beary told ABC News. "We are also seeing more guns involved, not only handguns, but we've got a bit of a violent gang mentality out there where they want to carry the high-powered semiautomatic handguns, but they'll also go to a semiautomatic rifle at times," Beary said.

Many battle-tested police are shocked at the cold-blooded disregard for life. For many others the reality is hitting close to home — and it is happening with alarming frequency all across the country.

Full Story: <http://www.abcnews.go.com/WN/LegalCenter/Story?id=3474259&page=1>



7 North Central High School Students Arrested on Gang Activity Charges

Article published in the Indianapolis Star

08/24/2007 Indianapolis, IN | Seven North Central High School students have been arrested on charges of criminal gang activities after a fight in the cafeteria. Two large groups of males came together in a hallway near the cafeteria about 7:20 a.m. Thursday and began shouting “Northside” and “Eastside,” according to a report from Special Deputy Thaddeus Jones of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department.

The report said Jones and school administrator Will Tyler tried to separate the groups to move in different directions when a 16-year-old ran through the crowd and tackled another student. His age was listed as 16 and 17 in different parts of the report.



The fight then moved into the cafeteria, the report said, and progressed to the use of fists. “Several other males joined the fight at this time,” the report said. “Assistant principal Tyler attempted to break up the fight, assisted by Deputy Jones.” At one point during the fight, science teacher Martin Kelty saw Devin L. Finney, 18, trying to flee after throwing several blows at other students, the report said. While trying to restrain a student, Kelty was struck by a knee, the report said.

Finney, the 16 year old and the boy who is 16 or 17 — as well as Rafael Alberto, 19; and another 16 and 17 year old — were charged with criminal gang activity, battery with injury, and disorderly conduct. Another 17-year-old was charged with criminal gang activity, battery on a school official, battery and disorderly conduct. All were taken to the Arrestee Processing Center.

Source: The Indianapolis Star



Graffiti Eradication Effort Shows Results

Article published by the Journal and Courier

08/28/2007 Lafayette, IN | When Mike Koning was asked in April to spearhead Lafayette's graffiti eradication efforts, he was given 118 cases of vandalism on private and public property. That number has diminished greatly - at last count on Aug. 13, only nine instances had not yet been painted over or removed. "Mayor Roswarski isn't interested in fining people," Koning says of Lafayette Mayor Tony Roswarski. "We're interested in cleaning it up. If we have an instance where, say, the property owner is down in Florida, I go ahead and clean it myself."

Graffiti eradication -- though initiated this spring by a Lafayette city ordinance -- also will be a goal officials hope to accomplish under the Weed and Seed initiative, which is being funded by a \$1 million Department of Justice grant. The idea is that removing the markings believed to be made by gangs will reduce turf wars and therefore reduce violence.



In addition to noting markings on homes and garages, Koning focuses on profanity in city parks and schools. "Our children don't need to be exposed to that," he said. Cleanup efforts began when the city council passed an ordinance this spring that holds property owners financially and physically responsible for not getting graffiti removed in a timely manner.

Officials, though, say it's too early to determine whether the eradication is having an effect because the issues are not directly correlated, according to deputy chief John Dennis of the Lafayette Police Department. "Graffiti is one of the major indicators of a community in decline," he said. "People who are involved in criminal gangs often target those areas -- that's why we encourage eradication. "It's difficult to determine, but it's an indication of our blight."

Tippecanoe County prosecutor Pat Harrington said his office continues to see crimes being committed by those whom investigators have deemed gang members. At one recent sentencing of a cocaine dealer believed to be a part of the Sur 13 gang in Lafayette, his fellow gang members piled into the courtroom. "It's a challenge for us," Harrington said. "We have a long way to go in terms of understand their community."

Full Story: <http://www.jconline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2007708280333>

Frankfort Police Hail Gang Arrests

Article published in the Journal and Courier

09/05/2007 Frankfort, IN | In the past few months, vandals have wreaked an estimated \$20,000 in damage to a city golf course, school, homes and vehicles. But to authorities, the graffiti -- often viewed as a sign of gang presence -- is a sign of progress. That is because violent crimes have gone down in the area since the arrest of suspected gang members in a drive-by shooting last September. "This puts a big damper on the Latin Kings," Frankfort police Chief Jim Moudy said Tuesday morning outside the Clinton County Courthouse, minutes after four men were arraigned for what's believed to be a gang-related, drive-by shooting almost a year ago. "Their top men are in jail. ... It's a great day for the police department and the community. We're not going to stand for this."

A total of six Frankfort men -- three of them suspected gang members -- have been charged with numerous felony counts in connection to the September 2006 shooting. Five of them appeared Tuesday in Clinton Circuit Court during morning and afternoon initial hearings. No one was injured in the shooting, though several rounds were fired into a house at 905 S. Third St. and at a Frankfort police officer who came upon the crime.

Clinton County prosecutor Anthony Sommer said the shooting is believed to have been prompted by Latin Kings angered that members of the Sur 13 gang were invading their territory. "The case we have here essentially involves big-city crime in a small town," Sommer said. "I think we're fighting this situation." The suspected gang members, Bladimer Martinez, 22, Juan Lucio, 23, and Andrew Castillo, 23, all were ordered held on a \$500,000 cash-only bond. They are charged with 13 felonies, including attempted murder and conspiracy to commit murder. The crime involved two handguns and a shotgun, he said.

Full Story: <http://www.jconline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070905/NEWS03/709050333/1152/NEWS>



Outlaws Facing Federal Charges

Article published by the Detroit Free Press

08/16/2007 Fort Wayne, IN | Federal authorities said Wednesday that the indictment of 16 members of the Outlaws Motorcycle Club from Michigan and Indiana struck a major blow to the organization's criminal activity, which they said includes selling drugs and using violence. With nicknames such as Tom the Bomb, the men, according to the 18-count indictment, sold cocaine and methamphetamine, trafficked in firearms and assaulted members of the rival Hells Angels Motorcycle Club.



The indictment -- and the arrests of 11 of those charged -- busts up a gang that authorities say had chapters in Detroit, Wyandotte, Bay City, Grand Rapids, Indianapolis and Ft. Wayne, Ind. It also is the latest blow struck by law enforcement against the Outlaws, considered an international criminal organization by the U.S. government. Fifteen members in Boston were arrested in July on drug and firearms charges. It also comes after the U.S. Attorney's Office in Detroit indicted members of the Highway Men, another motorcycle gang, earlier this year.

Among those indicted in this latest round was Leroy Frasier, the so-called Black Region president -- the label used for Michigan and Indiana -- who at one time led the Bay City chapter. Authorities said each chapter had its own facility where it conducted business, but the entire region's membership generally would gather at 16815 W. Warren in Detroit, about a half-mile east of the Southfield Freeway. Six of the men were indicted for assault with a dangerous weapon for an attack in April 2006 on several members of the Hells Angels with a cane, hammer and motorcycle parts.

Full Story: <http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070816/NEWS01/708160410/0/SPORTS18>



Reputed 18th Street Gang Leader Gets 32 Years in Prison

Article published by the Indianapolis Star

08/19/2007 Indianapolis, IN | A Guatemalan man was sentenced last week by U.S. District Judge David Hamilton to more than 32 years in prison for his involvement as the leader of the 18th Street Gang in Indianapolis. Isaias Roderico Barrios-Lopez, 32, received the sentence for his involvement in what the U.S. District Court in Indianapolis referred to as "guns, gangs and drugs," according to a statement from Mary E. Bippus, spokeswoman for U.S. Attorney Susan W. Brooks for the Southern District of Indiana. Indianapolis police in 2005 said the 18th Street Gang and the Sur-13 gang considered each other bitter rivals. Barrios-Lopez was convicted of cocaine conspiracy and a firearms violation.

Source: *The Indianapolis Star*

Three Admitted Gang Members Arrested in Gun Thefts

Article published by the Grand Rapids Press

08/21/2007 Grand Haven, MI | Authorities say they have recovered 21 of the 50 guns stolen from two businesses this month, and three Holland Township teens with gang ties are in police custody. The oldest suspect, an 18-year-old man arrested Friday, was to be arraigned today in an Ottawa County District Court. He will be charged with breaking into two businesses.

His alleged accomplices are 14- and 16-year-old boys, sheriff's Lt. Mark Bennett said. "They're all admitted gang members and they are known to us," Bennett said of the suspects. He said more arrests could be made.

On Aug. 8, thieves broke into the Gold Coast Outfitters in Port Sheldon Township. Two days later, Felix's Marina & Gun Shop near Grand Haven was robbed. The double-plated glass at Felix's was smashed and 36 weapons, including semi-automatic assault rifles and shotguns were taken, the owner said.

Sheriff's officials said a total of 50 weapons were stolen from the businesses. "All these players seem to be in that 14- to 18-year-old range, and the individuals we have now are cooperating," Bennett said. The 14-year-old has no criminal history, but the 16-year-old has a previous weapons charge, the lieutenant said. Bennett said the 16-year-old likely will remain in juvenile detention.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms offered a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone involved with the crime. Bennett said his deputies received an anonymous tip, which led them to those arrested.

Full Story: <http://www.mlive.com/news/grpress/index.ssf?/base/news-37/1187698521122420.xml&coll=6>



55 Gang Members Face Deportation

Article published by the Chicago Sun Times

08/29/2007 Waukegan, IL | Operation Lake County Gang Search 2007 has been under way since Sunday in Waukegan, coming in the wake of last month's major immigration rights rally and the decision by police to apply for special training to deport violent criminals.



"This is not part of 287(g)," Waukegan Police Chief Bill Biang said, referring to the federal enforcement authorization. "It could be as long as two years before we even get that program in place. We do these type of big roundups all the time."

Biang said Tuesday that Waukegan -- along with Libertyville, Mundelein, the Lake County Sheriff's Office and other area police departments -- has 10 officers out looking for 96 known gang members with deportation warrants from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency.

"So far we've picked up 55 across Lake County and about 21 in Waukegan alone," said Biang, who emphasized that the criminals are not exclusively illegal immigrants. "We're using ICE's assistance and authority to remove these gang members. Whether they are here legally or not, they are eligible for deportation."

ICE spokeswoman Gail Montenegro confirmed the initiative and said several similar operations, to arrest sex offenders or fugitives, for instance, have routinely been undertaken in Lake County.

Tensions boiled over last month in Waukegan, where the population is over 50 percent Hispanic, when community leaders protested the city council's decision to apply for training from ICE in order to facilitate deportation of convicted violent criminals. Mayor Richard Hyde entered into an agreement with local Hispanic organizations promising not to use the authority for traffic offenders or non-violent criminals.

"We don't do the big roundups everyday, but it shows that if we had the ability to work with the 287(g) process we wouldn't have to do these large roundups and there wouldn't be 96 offenders loose on the street," Biang said.

Source: *Chicago Sun Times*

Thrown Rock may be Behind Slaying of Addison Teen

Article published by the Chicago Tribune

08/23/2007 Chicago, IL | An Addison teen was shot and killed after gang members blamed him for throwing something, a DuPage County prosecutor said today. Two Addison teenagers believed to be gang members were being held today in lieu of bail in the slaying of the 14-year-old boy in a strip mall parking lot.

Matthew Cruz and Jhony Aragon, both 15, were charged as adults in the Tuesday afternoon fatal shooting of Francisco Baiza of Addison. Both face two counts of first-degree murder. Cruz's bail is \$500,000, and Aragon's bail is \$400,000. Both were shackled and wore purple sweat shirts and dark slacks in court today before DuPage Judge Brian Diamond.

Assistant State's Atty. Paul Marchese said Aragon thought that Baiza, who was soon to enter Addison Trail High School as a freshman had thrown a brick or a rock at Cruz's home earlier that day. When Cruz and Aragon met Baiza by chance at the Addison shopping center, they approached him and flashed gang signs.

Baiza responded, "I'm nothing. I'm nothing," Marchese said. At that point, Marchese said, Aragon began to pull a .25-caliber semiautomatic handgun out of a paper bag when it discharged into the ground. Cruz then pulled his .25-caliber semiautomatic and shot the victim three to five times, Marchese said.

They fled to a nearby apartment, where police found them hiding in a bathroom and the guns hidden in a closet in a nearby room. Family members for both defendants appeared in Bond Court this morning. Public Defender Robert Miller said Cruz's parents have had difficulty with him in the past, and at one point sent him out of the country to get him away from his gang relationships.

State's Atty. Joe Birkett said Wednesday that Cruz and Aragon were members of the same gang.

Source: Chicago Tribune



Teen Shot, Killed on Carpentersville Street

Article published by the Chicago Daily Herald

08/03/2007 Carpentersville, IL | A Carpentersville teen will remain behind bars unless he comes up with \$200,000 cash, after being ordered held Saturday in the death of another teen in a gang-related shooting. Henry L. Black, 17, of 94 Birch St., was charged with first-degree murder with intent and first-degree murder with the probability of death. He was ordered held on \$2 million Saturday, meaning he would have to come up with 10 percent of that in order to be released.

Prosecutors will attempt to prove Black intended to kill Aaron Razo, 17, of the 1700 block of Kingston Circle, Carpentersville, and shot him knowing there was a probability he would die, according Assistant Kane County State's Attorney Kelly Orland. When Black walked into the hearing, Judge Linda Abrahamson exclaimed, "I know you! You were in my courtroom just last week!"

Black acknowledged he had been there on minor charges and was released with credit for the time he already had spent in jail. He was handcuffed with his hands in front of him. Black sat still and showed no emotion as Abrahamson told him that if he was convicted of the two charges, it could mean life in prison for him, or even death

Carpentersville police have acknowledged Razo and Black were members of rival street gangs. Police said there was a disagreement earlier Thursday between the two gangs and members of one gang set out Thursday evening to shoot someone from the other one. "Anyone from the other gang would do, even if they weren't involved in the argument," Carpentersville Deputy Police Chief Michael Gillette said.

Police said several shots were fired, one struck Razo and they believe their case against Black is strong. "On Thursday evening, our police station was filled with witnesses to the shooting," Cmdr. Michael Kilbourne said.

Source: Chicago Daily Herald

Police: Gangs, Drug Dealers Get Into Kidnapping

Article published by CNN

08/04/2007 Philadelphia, PA | When two men snatched a 7-year-old at gunpoint from a drug-plagued neighborhood this summer, they hoped to get \$250,000 in ransom. The plan unraveled when the captors saw the youngster's father with police -- a turn they had not anticipated. They let the boy go unharmed two hours later.

The quarter-million-dollar ransom may seem staggering given the boy's gritty Southwest Philadelphia neighborhood. But police say drug gangs can demand huge sums after kidnapping a rival, a dealer's girlfriend or child, or even the occasional shopkeeper. "When you bring these drug dealers in, they say there clearly is that kind of money out there," Lt. John Walker said. "There's a lot of cash out there on the street."

While police investigate only a small number of such cases each year, they believe many more go unreported by victims who don't want to call attention to their own illegal pursuits. "You don't have a good handle on how many times it happens, though we know they do because folks come in and tell us about it later," said FBI agent Vito Roselli, who investigated the case of Erica Pratt, a sprightly 7-year-old whose escape from a summer 2002 kidnapping riveted the city.

Pratt's captors sought \$150,000. This summer, kidnappers demanded \$450,000 to release a club owner who was shot, stabbed and left bound in a dank basement. Neither ransom was paid. But Walker knows of one drug-related abduction that a family settled quietly for half the \$50,000 demand.

The victims typically survive after a short, harrowing, ordeal. If a family comes up with the money, the victim is set free before police ever get involved. "A dead body's no use to them," Walker said.

But not all of the city's kidnappings end peacefully. It has been a year since Shamari Taylor disappeared after armed men grabbed him and his girlfriend off a West Philadelphia street. They were blindfolded and taken to a building where the woman could hear Taylor being tortured. She was released the next morning, but the crime didn't end there. Two men broke into Taylor's home later that day and shot his mother and sister before grabbing \$5,000 to \$10,000 in cash from his bedroom. Taylor, 26, has never been found.

Full Story: <http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/09/04/drug.kidnappings.ap/index.html>



School-Shooting Fugitives Have MS-13 Gang Ties

Article published by the New York Times

08/13/2007 Newark, NJ | As Newark cops yesterday continued hunting for three people suspected in a grisly schoolyard massacre there, residents said several of the men were part of a notorious street gang.



It also emerged that one of the fugitives, Rodolfo Godinez, obtained a green card in 2001 and was allowed to stay in the United States despite later robbery and assault arrests, immigration authorities said yesterday.

Godinez pleaded guilty to lesser charges.

His fellow fugitives include his 16-year-old brother and another youth, both of whom attended Mount Vernon School, the scene of the Aug. 4 triple slaying.

Recently, Godinez's brother and another youth already nabbed in the murders "started bragging on how they were part of this gang, MS-13," said a classmate of the duo.

Also known as Mara Salvatrucha, the ruthless MS-13 gang operates in the United States and Central America.

Source: *New York Times*

Death Leads to Web Threats

Article published by the Times-Union

08/21/2007 Albany, NY | City police were monitoring social networking sites on the Internet Monday after learning revenge threats were posted following the shooting death of a 15-year-old boy over the weekend. The threats, on the Web site MySpace, promised to find whoever shot Shahied Oliver at a party over the weekend, and that the attacker would be "taken care of."



The MySpace threats were reported by local TV station CBS-6.

Albany Police spokesman Detective James Miller said the department was aware of the postings.

"It's no different than threats made on the street," Miller said. "This is just a different way to do it. We are aware of it and we are monitoring."

Oliver's death was the city's first homicide of 2007.

Oliver, of Albany, was shot in the chest during a birthday party early Saturday at the Skyline Gardens apartments near Lark Street in the Arbor Hill neighborhood. No arrests have been made. Police said it's possible the shooting was related to a feud between uptown and downtown Albany youth.

For several years, violence has erupted on city streets -- including drive-by shootings, stabbings and assaults. Police have said the incidents have stemmed from ongoing feuds between street gangs and other groups of young people who live in the South End, Arbor Hill and West Hill. At the party, a witness next door reported loud music interrupted by a single gunshot.

Source: The Times-Union



Tagging: More than Vandalism

Article published by the Victorville Daily Press

08/25/2007 Hesperia, CA | Taggers cost High Desert residents hundreds of thousands of dollars each year, and now, their acts have claimed the life of a 65-year-old woman. "People need to wake up and realize it's not just spray-paint. It's more serious than that and it's been more serious than that," said Deputy Joe Catalano of the Sheriff's Department High Desert Regional Gang Team.

Using the most recent statistics available over a one-year period, a graffiti abatement crew in Hesperia cleaned up 2,687 locations and 3,319 city signs ending in February 2007, said city spokeswoman Kelly Malloy. The city budgeted \$224,818 to add a second abatement team.

In Victorville in 2006, 575,000 square feet of graffiti over 6,990 locations cost \$131,000 to remove using one abatement team, according to Yvonne Hester, spokeswoman for the city. Those numbers were up considerably from 2005 when there were 356,000 square feet of vandalized property.

Still, investigators say, the violence that can accompany tagging harms the community more than the blight it causes and the money spent to remove it. Taggers are doing everything they can to promote themselves and establish a turf, officials say, often at the cost of victims such as "Sue" Tausili.

"These aren't 'junior' gangs. They have their own subculture — they're into hip hop, they're into clothing and partying and they're into their perception of art. But they operate as street gangs. They take this subculture so seriously that they would kill for this 'art.'"

In a recent case, an 18-year-old and a 20-year-old were sentenced to state prison time for felony vandalism and received a gang enhancement and will come out as parolees, Catalano said. As such, the groups, by virtue of repeatedly creating felony vandalism, are text book gang members.

Full Story: http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/gang_2504_article.html/year_vandalism.html

Authorities use GPS to Fight Graffiti

Article published by the St. Petersburg Times

08/26/2007 Pico Rivera, CA | Police in Pico Rivera are using cutting-edge technology to clean up their city, one vandal at a time. The new system, called Graffiti Tracker, is used to catalog and compare incidents of graffiti that normally would be lost under piles of extensive paperwork.

Graffiti Tracker utilizes cameras equipped with global positioning system technology. Photos of graffiti are taken by cleanup crews and can be uploaded to a Web site, where they are analyzed and categorized for reference. Capt. Mike Rothans said the system has helped in the prosecution of suspects accused in the Aug. 10 fatal shooting of Maria Hicks. Steve Gutierrez, public safety manager for Pico Rivera, said Graffiti Tracker has been a success since it was implemented last September. In September 2006, Pico Rivera experienced 828 incidents of vandalism. This June, the city had 324 "tags." "We've had over 60 arrests that have been directly attributable to the Graffiti Tracker system," Gutierrez said.

Graffiti Tracker, a private company with offices in Long Beach that partners with cities as a private contractor, sorts graffiti by moniker, or the name a tagger uses. In this way, individual taggers can be tracked through each act of vandalism they commit. This allows police to focus efforts on the most prolific vandals, using resources to apprehend the most destructive taggers first and quickly reducing the number of incidents in the city.

The Graffiti Tracker company was founded in January of 2006, and employs about a dozen analysts. The program typically costs cities \$24,000-\$30,000 each year, and is based on the concentration of graffiti in the area. Because Pico Rivera was one of the first cities to contract with the company, its cost was lower. Pico Rivera pays about \$18,000 each year, which comes from the city's general fund.

Vandals caught through the program have already been ordered by the courts to pay about \$30,000 for the damage they've caused, more than paying for the system. Gutierrez said the city spends about \$400,000 each year on managing vandalism, and the relatively small cost of the program has allowed city workers to concentrate on the beautification of Pico Rivera, rather than painting over tags.

"Those people who were eradicating graffiti are now trimming trees and other things that are needed for the city," Gutierrez said. Graffiti Tracker has also altered Deputy Sergio Peralta's job. As the School Resource Deputy for the El Rancho Unified School District and one of the primary users of the program, Peralta said the new system has been well worth the investment. "The word has gotten out that we've had three big awards given to us by the court in which the taggers have been forced to pay," Peralta said. "The taggers know that we have the system."

Full Story: http://www.sptimes.com/2007/07/15/Southpinellas/Legal_system_trying_t.shtml



Crips, Bloods out of MLB Hat Lineup

Article published by Newsday

08/24/2007 New York, NY | A lineup of team logo baseball caps that critics denounced as tailor-made for gang members was removed from store shelves by its manufacturer Friday after complaints from baseball officials.

"It has been brought to our attention that some combinations of icons and colors on a select number of our caps could be too closely perceived to be in association with gangs," said Christopher H. Koch, CEO of New Era Cap. "In response, we, along with Major League Baseball, have pulled those caps."



The three styles in question used colors and symbols linked to three gangs: an all-white cap with a blue bandanna, the trademark of the notorious Crips; an all-white cap with a red bandanna worn by the rival Bloods; and a black cap with a gold team logo and an embroidered crown, a symbol favored by the Latin Kings.

Richard Garcia, a karate instructor who works with Peace on the Street to provide youngsters with alternatives to gang activity, said he immediately recognized the hats' colors from his work with former gang members. "My fear was that the wrong kid was going to wear the wrong hat in the wrong neighborhood and get hurt," he said.

Full Story: <http://www.newsday.com/news/local/wire/newyork/ny-bc-ny--gangcaps0824aug24.0.5753602.story>

Teens with Banned Haircuts Arrested After Football Brawl

Published by the Post and Courier

08/25/2007 Colleton County, SC | Three brothers prohibited from attending school in Colleton County until they remove words and symbols shaved into their hair were among 10 juveniles arrested Friday night after a brawl. The juveniles were arrested about 10 p.m. following the Colleton County vs. Wando high school football game, Lt. Ken Dasen said. They were charged with disorderly conduct and most were in the process of being released to their parents late Friday night, Dasen said. "After the football game they all gathered up in a big group and decided to fight," Dasen said.

Melvin Bowens said his three sons, Marvin, 16; Jerriel Bowens, 14; and Melvin Jr., 13, had just showed up at the stadium when a group of young men ran up to them and attacked them. The father said the attackers came from alleged gangs known as Loopside and Sand Hill. One of the attackers said, "See what Sand Hill can do to you?" according to a cousin of the victims, the father said.

Colleton County School District officials have refused to allow the Bowens brothers to attend school because they said the markings they have shaved into their hair are gang monikers. The brothers have incorporated stars and the words "Jacktown" and "Jackboy" into their haircuts. School officials said similar stars have been adopted by big-city gangs, and the Colleton County Sheriff's Office recognizes the Jacktown Boys as an active gang from the community of Jacksonboro.

Full Story: http://www.charleston.net/news/2007/aug/25/head_head14030/



Program Helps Students Avoid Gang Members

Article published by the San Diego Union-Tribune

08/01/2007 San Diego, CA | At least two San Diego schools have asked to be part of a program designed to protect students from gang members. The state's Safe Passage program, rolled out in March at 16 schools in Southern California, relies on police officers and firefighters to ensure children get to and from school without getting accosted.

In San Diego, the concept is in place at Gompers Charter Middle School and Montgomery Middle School. The results have been dramatic. The City Council Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee, which listened to a progress report last week, was told nine gangs are located near Gompers and four near Montgomery. Before the program started, gang members stalked students on school grounds. Some children were harassed. Others were beaten up.

One eighth-grade Montgomery student was so scared that he started getting into trouble on purpose, school counselor Phyllis Meredith told the committee. "So he could go home early and not have to face the gang group trying to recruit him," Meredith said.



The stories troubled committee members, including Councilman Tony Young. "These kids don't feel safe going to school – what a terrible situation," Young said.

Young helped persuade the California Office of the Attorney General to bring the Safe Passage program to San Diego. The state office works with police, fire and other city officials, including the Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention.

After identifying problem areas, police, firefighters and parks and recreation workers are instructed to increase their presence an hour before and an hour after school. "Gang members are literally jumping out of bushes and attacking students," said Deputy City Attorney Makini Hammond, who organized the first meetings at Gompers and Montgomery.

Full Story: http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20070801/news_1m1gangs.html

Why Do Kids Join Gangs?

Published by the News-Record

08/26/2007 Greensboro, NC | You see Al Pacino's face a lot in the hood. Like a patron saint, he appears nearly everywhere in gang territory — on posters, car hoods and even tattoos. "Scarface," a 16-year-old gang member says, eyes lighting up. "That's the flick. Because that's how you do it. You ain't given nothing in this life. You got to get yours." For many viewers, the 1983 film — about a drug dealer who rises from poverty only to be gunned down in his mansion — is a morality tale and a warning to those who aspire to the gangster life.

But to kids in Greensboro's poorest neighborhoods, it's a Cinderella story. They imitate Pacino, quote lines from the film and play the "Scarface" video game, which rewards players for taunting the people they shoot. Increasingly, the line between fantasy and reality seems to be disappearing.



Greensboro ranked third in the state for gang activity, behind Durham and Fayetteville, according to a National Youth Gang Center survey released in 2005. The rankings are based on the number of gangs, gang membership and gang homicides. Greensboro police say the city had at least 10 gang-related homicides last year. Four homicides and several shootings have been tied to gang activity this summer alone. The City Council and police department are struggling with how to handle the problem.

At the heart of the debate: What attracts kids to gangs in the first place? Bloods, Crips and MS13 members all say they can identify with "Scarface." The feeling of being an outsider, dismissed and looked down on, is what gang members say drew them to their crews. And the dream of attaining wealth and respect — even by violence and drug dealing — drives them.

Family and respect

"Don't nobody care about us," says an 18-year-old Blood from the Ray Warren Homes neighborhood who calls himself TT. "Ain't nobody looking out for us. When was the last time you saw the mayor down here?"

Although he's a high school dropout, TT's not stupid. He can see that black kids in poor neighborhoods are treated differently. He points to National Night Out earlier this month, when police and city officials went to cookouts in Greensboro. In some neighborhoods, kids got tours of firetrucks and emergency vehicles, TT says. At Ray Warren, they got the same two cops who always patrol the housing project.

"It's up to the police to organize Night Out, but we have limited resources," police Chief Tim Bellamy says. "We use our on-duty personnel, and anyone else we have to pay them time-and-a-half. That goes for the fire department, too. They use their on-duty personnel."

Whatever the reason, TT says, kids in his neighborhood have come to feel ignored — never as important as white kids or rich kids. As part of a gang, they feel they matter. TT rolls up his sleeve to show a homemade tattoo: three black dots that make a Dawg Paw, a sign of his gang allegiance. "This is what we grow up with," he says. "It's natural. You look and you see a gang, but we take care of our boys. We take care of our set. We take care of our neighborhood."

Some neighbors in gang-heavy areas say they feel anything but taken care of. They're afraid to let their children play outside. Many avoid even saying the word "gang" out loud, and none would give their names for fear of reprisal. "It's not good for the neighborhood or the children who grow up in the neighborhood who get mixed up in it," says a 23-year-old mother of two from the Smith Homes neighborhood. "But that's just the way it's always been. Everybody does it. It's like you just have to get used to it as part of living here."

A 42-year-old woman in the same neighborhood says: "It's better if you don't even talk about it." She says she tries to keep her grandson away from gangs but worries he'll get mixed up in it. "You look around the neighborhood," she says, "and this is not what you want for the children, to be doing these things, to be selling drugs and violent." Drugs and violence are part of gang life, TT says, but it's about more than that. "You got to be part of a crew that has respect. That's like family, boy."

James Howell, a senior research associate with the National Youth Gang Center, says gangs can feel like a family — but that's largely an illusion. "Gangs give these kids status, a self-identity, and they call that their family," says Howell, who has a doctorate in criminology. "More than anything, that shows they come from poorly structured, fractured families. That leads them to have a skewed perspective."

Howell says kids replicate a sense of belonging through gangs and, just as important, get a feeling of protection. "Yeah, they see those colors, they know it's you and your boys," says a 16-year-old Crip from the Groometown Road area. "It ain't you alone. You ain't never alone. That's the truth."

Police officer J.L. Jackson-Stroud is assigned to Ray Warren Homes, where he says gang affiliation is open. Members proudly display their colors even in front of police. With broken families common, Jackson-Stroud says, young kids look for mentors and role models — and too often find them in gangs. "I would say the average age of gang members in this area is 14," Jackson-Stroud says. "They definitely start young."

Detective Ernest Cuthbertson, the only Greensboro police officer assigned to gangs full time, says he has seen kids as young as 8 get involved. "And there's no cap on how old they can be either," says Cuthbertson, who has dealt with gangs in Greensboro for 15 years. "It can get to be that the whole family is involved, so it becomes a rite of passage — like when your father and grandfather went to Duke or UNC."

Many gang members, or gangbangers, say gangs have been part of their neighborhoods for so long that it has become normal. "Everybody you know is in a crew," says the 16-year-old Crip who loves "Scarface." "Your brother, your best friend, your father was in a crew, too. That's just what's happening."

He says people on the outside think gangs pressure kids to join or tell members they can't leave. That's not how he sees it. "It ain't like nobody makes you be in a crew," he says. "You can't make somebody have nothing in their heart. You can't make nobody have loyalty. But it ain't like you see it — it ain't like it's scary s---."

Outsiders in America

For Latino gangs, there is an extra element: the shared experience of living in a different culture. Many members are immigrants or first- and second-generation Americans. "It's different for us," says a member of MS13 whose back, arm and wrist tattoos advertise his crew. "It's like this is a new country. Because that's how they look at you. They look at you like this isn't your country."

Another 24-year-old in MS13 says: "I been here 12 years, but I can (expletive) speak English. I can (expletive) speak English better than some white people." MS13 also appeals to young men proud of their culture but without an outlet for that pride in a city dominated by black and white. "So you got your set. You got your signs. You got your colors," one member says. "You belong. That's like saying, 'This is where I belong.'"



Cuthbertson says many gangs exist solely for criminal activity, but some are created by prejudice. "There is a serious issue of racial discrimination when it comes to Latino kids," he says. Although many MS13 members come from Latin and Central American countries, the gang was founded in America by immigrants who faced racism and violence.

One MS13 member says being Latino means you don't belong anywhere. "White people look down on black people, but even black people are, like, looking down on us, calling us names," the 34-year-old says. "They think we're the new niggers."

Get rich or die trying

After working in public housing for 22 years, Tina Akers-Brown says she has seen the gang problem get worse. Akers-Brown, the executive director of Greensboro Public Housing, blames drug dealing, the get-rich-quick mentality it inspires, and gangs from larger cities moving in to recruit. "These kids are just like any other kids," she says. "They just have fewer opportunities. When you have fewer opportunities, these are the kinds of decisions you make."

Drug dealing isn't a secret. Gangbangers brag about it. By hustling, they're just latching on to the hood's only

growth industry, they say. "Ain't no business down here. Ain't nobody coming out here to help us out, give us opportunity," TT says. "We do it ourselves."

A 19-year-old Crip from the Rosewood neighborhood agrees. "Nobody's out here offering nobody a job," he says. "Hustling is where the money is, and that's what anybody would be doing if they lived here, too."

Former drug dealers turned millionaires are the idols of young gangbangers. When the wisdom of hustling is questioned, kids quote the successes. Rapper Jay-Z, who grew up in Brooklyn's Marcy Projects, went from low-level drug dealing to running Def Jam records. Rapper 50 Cent was a crack dealer before he had multiplatinum hits. The title of his first album, "Get Rich or Die Trying," has become a motto for kids in poor neighborhoods.

But the reality is that gang kids don't get rich selling drugs, Howell says. "Street gangs hardly ever actually control drug trafficking," he says. "That's done by the big boys, drug cartels. They don't wear colors. They don't want you to know who they are. Street-gang drug dealing is very low level."

Musicians who brag about gangbanging and drug dealing are selling kids a dangerous fantasy, Cuthbertson says. "The kids look up to 50 Cent, Jay-Z and The Game," he says. "They think these guys are real hard-core gangsters, but they're not. They're studio-made gangsters being used by corporate industry to make money."

What future?

Beyond fantasies of diamond-encrusted goblets, gangbangers can't tell you much about their futures. "I think I could make it in the rap game," says one 15-year-old Crip from an East Greensboro neighborhood. "You can make that happen." He points to the success of rapper and movie star Snoop Dogg, who claims allegiance to the Rollin' 20 set of Crips. Asked if he can rap or craft beats, the 15-year-old says: "I'm working on that part." For now, he's hustling.

Eventually, some gang members see where that lifestyle can lead. "I got out of it because I knew too many people got shot, too many people went to jail," a 17-year-old former Blood says. "It's like, I'm not going to wait my turn. It happens to everybody."

He says no one tried to keep him from leaving, but he lost a lot of friends. Nearly everyone he knows is in a gang. "You feel like an outcast," he says. "You feel like a punk."

Most gang members say they have no plans to get out. "This is it," says a 19-year-old Crip from East Greensboro. He smiles and opens his arms, gesturing to the empty streets of the housing project his crew calls home. "This is what's happening," he says. "This is for life."

Source: The Greensboro News-Record

From the Editors 



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L.E.C.C. Program
C/O U.S. Attorney's Office
5400 Federal Plaza, Suite 1500
Hammond, IN 46320
Phone: (219) 937-5666
Fax: (219) 937-5537
E-mail: ryan.holmes@usdoj.gov or
jesse.rodgers@sbcglobal.net

