



G.A.I.N.

GANG ACTIVITY INFORMATION NETWORK



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Department
of Justice



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POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

Scams Build Gang Empire

Article published by the Chicago Tribune

Chicago, IL | From his second-story office in a grimy South Side commercial building, crime lord Marvel Thompson kept watch over his turf. The reputed king of the Black Disciples street gang relied on beatings, murder and mayhem to control drug-selling corners across the South Side, prosecutors allege. To lock in territory, the 36-year-old Robeson High School dropout also deployed a more sophisticated weapon: mortgage fraud.

Over the course of a decade, Thompson used straw buyers, sham sales and phony identities to secure more than \$1 million in mortgage loans that went unpaid, records and interviews show.

The Black Disciples' expert use of mortgage fraud signals a menacing development. Once confined to a relatively small group of swindlers, mortgage fraud has morphed into a method of supporting ongoing criminal enterprises such as drug-dealing, smuggling and prostitution, records and interviews show.

Thompson acquired vacant lots, single-family homes and hulking apartment buildings that wrapped around corners where his gang dealt crack and heroin. Gang functionaries lived in some buildings and used others to store drugs and weapons and to stage operations, the Tribune found.

Thompson and a circle of criminal associates used the property to sop up lucrative bank loans. And they collected hundreds of thousands of dollars more from U.S. government Section 8 checks that are supposed to go to landlords to subsidize the rents of poor families. Similar schemes have cropped up in the Chicago area and across the country, court records show.

A coast-to-coast methamphetamine ring based in the southwest suburbs--known to prosecutors as the Esawi organization--used mortgage fraud to launder drug profits. Traveling Vice Lord Marc Roberson, a convicted cocaine dealer, worked with a swindling crew to secure mortgage loans on two ramshackle West Side homes.



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Group Not Giving Up Fight To Curb Gang Problem

Article published by WSBT 22

11/29/2007 Goshen, IN | It's a unique way for a small city to deal with a big city problem. As Goshen's Hispanic population grows, some say gangs are growing with it. Now, the community is trying to fight gangs with gangs. Former gang member Joe Guerrero has spent the past 10 years trying to combat the problem. He says the best way to do that is to create what he calls positive gangs that encourage teens to learn new skills.

It's hard not to notice or look at the gang graffiti under overpasses. But it's something Juan Pindda didn't expect when his brother moved to Goshen. "About two or three of his friends got killed in stabbings, shootings," he said.

Indiana's Hispanic population is 4.5 percent; Goshen's is 19 percent, making it one of the state's largest. It's growing and some say so are the gangs. "I look at the things here and it's about five to 10 years backwards than it is in LA, the dress code, the attitudes," said Pindda. Over the years, people have tried to removed the marks that gangs have left on the community, but some say it's not a pointless fight. "We tell our kids they are here for a purpose and so are we, and what we are here for is to make a difference," said Joe Guerrero, executive director of Communities in Schools of Elkhart County.

Differences that come by way of mentoring and positive gangs created by the organization. "We have to teach our boys what it means to be a real men, real honor, real respect," said Guerrero. It's the idea behind Straight Clownin' Car Club, a positive gang that builds cars. "We wanted to do something in the community that didn't involve something wrong," said Homer Hernandez, a member of Straight Clownin' Car Club. "If I can teach you how to make money, you will be good for the rest of your life," said Pindda who founded the positive gang.



It's a lesson Pindda is teaching his sons who also like cars. "I tell him, 'Come here, buddy. Let's go change the spark plugs in the car. Let's go change a tire. Let me teach you what a brake system is.' The thing is encouraging kids more," said Pindda.

Communities in Schools is mentoring 100 kids and teens now. They want to help more, but don't have the resources to do that. Communities in Schools says if it can prevent one kid from joining a gang, then it's a success.

Source: WSBT 22



Seven Latin Kings Charged in Slaying

Article published by the Times

11/28/2007 Calumet City, IL | Seven gang members have confessed to killing a 16-year-old Calumet City girl in a retaliatory shooting early Saturday morning, police said Tuesday. All seven reputed Latin Kings are charged with first-degree murder and first-degree attempted murder in the killing of Melody J. Elias, said Calumet City police Chief Russell Larson. The men all implicated themselves in videotaped statements, Larson said.

According to Larson: Elias was sitting in a vehicle with boyfriend Daniel J. Witting, 19, just before 1:30 a.m. in front of Elias' mother's house in the 700 block of Newell Avenue. "Several carloads" of Latin Kings drove up and boxed in the vehicle. The Latin Kings yelled gang slurs and kicked the vehicle and tried to pull Witting and Elias from the vehicle. Elias and Witting tried to drive off, and one of the gang members pulled a semiautomatic pistol with an extended clip and shot about 10 times into the car. Witting was shot in both hands. He drove Elias to St. Margaret Mercy Healthcare Centers in Hammond, where she was pronounced dead.

The Latin Kings shot the pair in retaliation against a rival gang, the Latin Dragons, Larson said. The shooting was not over money or drugs, but over rivalry or perceived disrespect, investigators said. Witting may have been peripherally involved with gangs at some point, investigators said. Charged with murder and attempted murder are: Miguelangel Garcia, 23, Harvey; Lewis Crenshaw, 18, Calumet City; Llewellyn Peed, 19, Hammond; Albert Redmond, 18, of Dolton; Kevin Kerby, 21, Calumet City; Malaquies Gutierrez, 17, of Calumet City; Oscar Chaves, 20, Calumet City.



Full Story: <http://nwitimes.com/articles/2007/11/28/news/illiana/docfc83a67f3fdfccf5862573a100128a40.txt>

Gangs More Prominent in South Suburbs

Article published in the Times

12/02/2007 Calumet City, IL | The fact that three of the seven reputed Latin Kings charged in last month's murder in Calumet City of a 16-year-old resident doesn't surprise Joe Kosman. Kosman, deputy supervisor for gang prosecutions for the Cook County state's attorneys office, said the transient nature of modern society, coupled with increased mobility, makes defining gang affiliation by geographic area nearly impossible.

"People don't get born, raised and die in the same community anymore. You don't have people with roots in the community," he said. "Now, when people come into a neighborhood, they think they have to try to impress people. Now, all of a sudden someone who was a mid-level guy in a gang somewhere else is a leader."

Melody Elias, 16, was shot in the chest as she sat in a parked car with her boyfriend after finishing her shift at a local pizza restaurant. Seven men between the ages of 17 and 23 face first-degree murder and attempted first-degree murder charges in connection the death of Elias. Four have Calumet City addresses, while the others have addresses in Harvey, Hammond and Dolton. According to prosecutors, the men had gone looking for revenge on a rival gang after a reputed Latin King had his car set on fire. Police said Elias didn't have any gang affiliation.

Kosman, the former police chief of Blue Island, and former director for the South Suburban Major Crimes Task Force, is now stationed at the Sixth District Cook County Circuit Court in Markham, where he supervises gang-related cases. While he could not comment specifically on the on-going Calumet City case, Kosman was able to speak about the nature of gangs in the South Suburbs, where the lines of turf are blurred. "Everyone has cars now, too, so it doesn't matter if you're in Calumet City or Lansing or Orland Park or Hammond because you can go all over the place," he said. "It's not like the old days when you stood on the corner and declared your turf. There still are turf wars, but in the suburbs, those lines just aren't as clear."

Full Story: http://nwitimes.com/articles/2007/12/02/news/top_news/doc4c57a8b28ee73c71862573a50005d611.txt



Federal Help to Fight Gangs Finds Support

Article published by the Chicago Tribune

Regional 

11/27/2007 Chicago, IL | Law enforcement officials from Chicago and a number of suburbs voiced support Monday for a proposed federal law that would stiffen the penalties gang members could face for crimes and infuse more money into gang-prevention programs. "It's just sad and terrifying that we're still dealing with this type of violence," U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), a co-sponsor of the legislation, said at a roundtable held in Chicago. The bill was approved by the Senate in September and still needs approval by the House. The bill would make some crimes -- such as drug trafficking and street gang recruitment -- committed by gang members eligible for federal penalties, including time in the federal prison system.



Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart said the prospect of stiffer penalties could be a deterrent. He said 97 percent of offenders in the county prison system describe themselves as affiliated with a gang. "They understand the laws very well. If they knew that this could send them away to a federal penitentiary, it would change their outlook," Dart said. "We'd love to see these gang members afraid."

The proposal also would pump hundreds of millions into gang-prevention and intervention efforts through grants and the expansion of existing federal programs, Durbin said. Human service and law enforcement agencies can hinder gang recruitment and growth if they work together, said longtime gang researcher Irving Sperling, a professor emeritus at the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration. Deterring at-risk youths can be accomplished by a team approach of community agencies, he said. Police officials overwhelmingly agreed prevention tactics hold more promise than stiffer penalties for dealing with gangs. "It has to start with prevention," Aurora Police Chief William Powell said. "We can put them in prison until the cows come home, but what are we going to do once they turn around and get out prison?"

Full Story: http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-jones_24oct24,0,6412215.story?coll=chi_tab01_layout

MS-13 Gang Member in Nashville Sentenced 19 Years for Racketeering

Article published by the Nashville City Paper

11/27/2007 Nashville, TN | A member of what the federal government has deemed the most dangerous gang in America was sentenced to 19 years in federal prison for racketeering charges related to his shooting into the crowd at a well-known Nashville nightspot.

Geovanni “Rata” Pena, a member of the dreaded MS-13 gang, was sentenced to almost two decades in a federal penitentiary for the 2006 shooting of two men in a crowd at Club Coco Loco. Pena apparently thought he was targeting members of the rival Brown Pride street gang. Pena’s crimes also included the shooting of a man in 2006 at Percy Priest Lake who he believed was in the rival gang 18th Street. Pena admitted to both crimes. In addition, some of the violent acts alleged to have been committed by Nashville MS-13 members involved a drive-by shooting in **Indiana** and the planned murder of a law enforcement confidential informant in Maryland.

Pena was one of 14 alleged members of MS-13 indicted in January on racketeering charges in U.S. District Court for a string of murders and attempted murders in the Nashville area. The government’s expansive indictment details a highly structured gang environment with regular meetings, planned violence against other gangs in Nashville to maintain territories, a dues structure paid to MS-13 by members and a stash of firearms used to commit the acts of violence.



The Nashville field division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) and the Metro Nashville Police Department Gang Division led the investigation. The Nashville indictments were one of only a handful of major cases brought against MS-13 in the U.S. this year. A crackdown against the gang by the U.S. Department of Justice began in 2006.

“It is an important case,” ATF Special Agent in Charge Jim Cavanaugh told *The City Paper* on Wednesday. “...The reason this is so bad is because of the revenge factor. It turns into a cycle where people seek revenge. That is what can happen in a city.”

MS-13 is a gang made up of immigrants mainly from El Salvador. The gang was founded in Los Angeles in the 1980s, and many of the original members had combat experience in El Salvador’s civil war. The gang is known nationally for highly organized crimes and acts of brutality against their enemies, including the use of paramilitary tactics, automatic weapons and machete attacks. MS-13 is believed to be active in 33 states and Washington, D.C. with some 10,000 members.

Full Story: <http://www.nashvillecitypaper.com/news.php?viewStory=58092>



Street Gangs Move to the Country

Article published by Eyewitness News Everywhere 24

11/14/2007 Tipton County, TN | Eyewitness News Everywhere uncovers gang bangers moving to the country. Big city street gangs are setting up shop in rural areas of the Mid-South, including Tipton County, Tennessee. Members of the Tipton County Sheriff’s Department and Tennessee State Police met with people who live in the Covington area. “This is something I never had to worry about when I went to school. These children are so young. It is a problem here now,” says Sara Marcy.

Marcy says she never thought gang members would set up shop here in Tipton County. According to the sheriff’s department, gang activity is alive and well in this rural area. “We have seen some drug related crime and shootings,” says Sheriff J.T. “Pancho” Chumley.



Police say gang activity happens in rural areas because members either move to outside areas with family or relatives. Some gang members intentionally move to avoid law enforcement and other gang members set up shop after getting out of prison. Sheriff Chumley says drug trafficking is a big problem in Tipton County. He says cocaine and marijuana are the main drugs being run through Covington and the surrounding rural areas.

Full Story: http://www.myeeyewitnessnews.com/mostpopular/story.aspx?content_id=8bfd71ba-dd55-483a-baec-f1a35bf77cad

Belleville Students Suspended for MySpace Gang Poses

Article published by the Detroit Free Press

11/08/2007 Belleville, MI | Internet posturing and bravado by gang-banger wannabes has run smack into zero tolerance of school officials. Eight Belleville High School students were hauled before the school board last weekend to answer questions about photos posted on MySpace showing the kids claiming to be gang members posing with handguns, rifles, what looked like bags of marijuana and piles of money. One photo showing a student wearing body armor was captioned: "Better aim for my head."

Two of the students were expelled, three were suspended for the rest of the school year, two received lesser suspensions and one was reinstated in school, said Superintendent Pete Lazaroff. The different punishments were based on what the students, whose names were not released, were doing in the photos, Lazaroff said. Lazaroff said the photos -- some of which linked to the school -- are thought to be a challenge to another group. The photos have been removed from the site.



No criminal charges will be filed because authorities couldn't prove the guns and marijuana were real and it was difficult to tell where some of the photos were taken, raising questions about jurisdiction, said Ryan Bidwell, the Van Buren Township officer assigned to the school.

Law enforcement has found very little gang activity in the suburbs, said Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel. Instead, suburban kids are more often gangster wannabes trying to be intimidating, Hackel said. "Kids think it's funny, they think it's OK to do these things," Hackel said. "It's harassment, and it won't be tolerated."

Using the Internet to commit a crime is a criminal offense, carrying the same penalty as the underlying crime, Hackel said. "They get caught, and they say they were kidding," Hackel said. The kid may strike tough guy poses, he said, "but the interesting thing is, once we get them in a room, 99% of them are crying."

Source: Detroit Free Press



Tattoo Parlor Run by Cops Busts Gangs

Article published by CNN



11/16/2007 Augusta, GA | Walking into the Colur Tyme Tattoo Parlor is a lot like walking into a head shop. One wall is lined with gang monikers and symbols, the other with bongos for smoking marijuana and other drugs -- one even shaped like a skull. Only this head shop was a setup. It was a police front in a sting operation to bust gangs in this Georgia river city that most people associate with the Masters Tournament -- not violent thugs with high-powered weapons. Authorities said some guns sold to the shop were used in crimes just hours earlier.

The tattoo parlor was the brainchild of Richmond County Sheriff Ron Strength, who wanted to snuff out gangs carrying out violent crimes in his east Georgia community. The idea was to create a place where the gang members would feel right at home, said sheriff's Lt. Scott Peebles. And that they did. "We put the idea in their heads that there's no way these guys are in law enforcement," he said.

On Wednesday, more than 100 sheriff's officers, state investigators and agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives carried out a major bust after an 18-month joint investigation into the gang activity. Sixty-eight suspects were arrested on charges ranging from trafficking of illegal weapons to serious drug offenses. Authorities seized more than 300 weapons, including high-powered assault rifles.

Rich Marianos, a special agent with the ATF, said such gang activity is spreading across the nation, with small-town gangs increasing their ties with gangs in major cities. For instance, New York gangs have begun moving as far south as the Carolinas, where they set up operations to buy and sell guns and drugs, he said.

Chicago gang activity extends more than 60 miles into the Illinois city's suburbs for narcotics and weapons trading. In fact, Marianos said the ATF has begun seeing some Chicago gangs establishing a "pipeline" for illegal arms more than 500 miles away in Mississippi. "It's not just an urban problem," Marianos said. "We're seeing it all over the country."



Full Story - <http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/11/16/gang.bust/index.html?iref=newssearch>

Racketeering Laws Hit Local Gangs

Article published by the Bradenton Herald

11/04/2007 Manatee County, FL | They've been used for more than three decades to cripple the Mafia, corrupt labor unions and other organized crime. Now, Manatee County is using them to fight criminal street gangs - and the entire state is watching. State racketeering laws - modeled after the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act created in 1970 - are the latest weapon against the growing threat of gangs.

For the first time in Florida, the state filed racketeering charges in Manatee County against 23 alleged members of two criminal street gangs, accusing them of participating in ongoing criminal enterprises. Racketeering is when a group operates an illegal business or scheme for profit. "Now, in 37 years, we have criminal street gangs - not your classic mafia you see on TV like 'The Sopranos,' " said Thomas Smith, with the Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution.

For years, the government tried tackling illegal gangs by taking gang members to court one at a time. And, just like the classic mob cases, witnesses would disappear or refuse to testify against accused gang members. Case dismissed. So prosecutors, the Manatee County Sheriff's Office and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement decided to try using RICO laws.

With racketeering charges, cases can be prosecuted without the testimony of witnesses and victims. That solves one of the biggest problems prosecutors have in attempting to convict gang members. "RICO was chosen because you get to present to the court or jury the entire criminal enterprise," Florida Attorney General Bill McCollum said. "You put the activity of the accused into the context of the whole operation."

Instead of trying to prosecute a defendant for a single crime - shooting into a home, for example - investigators now build racketeering cases based on several crimes shown to have benefitted a criminal organization. "Taking one bad guy at a time means using one prosecutor for one case, and it takes a while," Smith said. "But if you have an enterprise - a fancy legal term for 'gang' - instead of one bad guy, one crime, you can take 15 bad guys at time and take the whole gang out. Use it against them."

Racketeering laws also allow for longer sentences. Racketeering and conspiracy to commit racketeering are first-degree felonies, so a person convicted of both crimes could spend up to 60 years in prison.

Full Story: <http://www.knowgangs.com/news/nov07/0501.php>



Gang Violence Leads Police in New Jersey to Use Fewer Witnesses

Article published by the New York Times

11/19/2007 Trenton, NJ | The strategy sounds almost illogical: Detectives in New Jersey are being urged to build criminal cases with as few witnesses as possible. Or with none at all.

In cities struggling with gang-related crimes, like Trenton and Newark, detectives said that even on the infrequent occasions when they find civilian witnesses who might be willing to testify, investigators are wary about pressuring them to appear in court. That reluctance is based on a fear that the authorities might not be able to protect witnesses from retaliation.



In the New Jersey State Police gang unit, the approach is so common that detectives have made hundreds of cases during the past five years, but used civilian testimony fewer than a dozen times, investigators said. Even Gov. Jon S. Corzine has directed police agencies in the state to use witnesses more sparingly in cases involving street gangs.

Detective Sgt. Ronald Hampton of the State Police, who has worked in the gang unit since 2002, said the testimony of civilian witnesses was considered evidence of last resort. "It used to be that when someone gave information, the first words out of a detective's mouth were, 'Are you willing to testify to that?'" Detective Hampton said. But no more.

Full Story: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/19/nyregion/19witness.html?_r=3&ref=nyregion&oref=slogin&oref=slogin&oref=slogin

So-called 'Gang Gear' a Troubling Trend

Article published by the KHOU 11 News

11/12/2007 Houston, TX | Gang members are decked out in clothing that communicates a message and a troubling trend. It's a brutal reality on the streets of the city of violent gangs living a lifestyle with a sense of style all their own. "Different clothing, different shoes, different shoe strings," expert Reginald Gordon said. A form of dress we noticed in areas commonly considered to be hotbeds of gang activity. An ex-gang member who once served time behind bars told 11 News where the so-called "gang gear" is coming from. "These merchants know what they're doing, and they're going to make their money whether it's killing our kids or not," Gordon said.

Profiting off of pain: That's how a number of local activists describe it, and they steered us to King's Best Market, in southeast Houston, a place with merchants they call the prime offenders. "It's all about a fast buck with them," community activist Quannel X said. "They don't care about the community."

11 News went into King's Best Market looking for a bandanna and was immediately asked which kind we wanted: red or blue. On the streets, blue bandannas are normally associated with a gang called the Crips, and the red, with the Bloods.



T-shirts for purchase were laced with disturbing messages. Some of them required little if any explanation, but some required some interpreted some of the others. "You've got a red bandanna standing for the bloods," Quannel X said. "This says Texas school of street smarts. ... What you have at the bottom is young black men hanging from trees.

Victor Gonzalez is the director of program services for the mayor's anti-gang office. "Sometimes the almighty dollar takes over, and people just want to make a buck without thinking about the ramifications it has for the community," Gonzalez said.

Full Story: http://www.khou.com/news/local/stories/khou071112_ac_gangwear.202781eba.html#



Hybrid Gangs Harder for Police to Track, Rule by Fear

Article published by KLAS 8 News

11/03/2007 Las Vegas, NV | More than 300 criminal gangs with nearly 8,000 members are on the streets of Southern Nevada, but these aren't the same one-dimensional gangsters we've heard about on the news for so many years. Metro detectives say the gangs have evolved into hybrids that are more sophisticated -- and more dangerous -- criminal organizations. The Channel 8 *I-Team* has been talking with the experts about this new breed of street gangster.

The intelligence detectives assigned to Metro's Gang Crimes unit are almost wistful when they talk about the old days of the Bloods and the Crips, when street gangs protected their 'hoods and were proud to wear their colors. Those days are largely gone.

Gangs are less turf conscious these days because they figure the whole valley is their turf. They're tougher to spot, almost impossible to infiltrate, and won't hesitate to kill you if you get in their way. Detective Carlos Acosta, with Metro Gang Intell, said, "Right now, where we're at, it's not a very good spot. But somebody's gotta roll through it. They've got the high ground on us up here."



From the back seat, it sounds like these gang detectives are describing a military combat zone where the enemy has the high ground. A combat zone is what it is, one of many in the Las Vegas Valley where heavily armed, notoriously violent street gangs live, party, and conduct business. Gangs are a fact of modern life, but the officers who work this dangerous beat every night say there's a new breed of gangster in town, like street gangs on steroids, and they aren't limited to just the toughest neighborhoods anymore. Det. Acosta continued, "They wind up in homes in Summerlin, they wind up with homes out in Henderson, they wind up in homes in the very communities that folks are trying to escape from that kind of violence."

Full Story: <http://www.klas-tv.com/Global/story.asp?S=7300961>

Police Chiefs Worry about Brazilian Gangs

Article published by the Midford Daily News

11/10/2007 Midford, MA | The two men are in their early 20s, share a passion for cars, and, according to the Framingham police, both were members of a gang with links to Brazil, the first one that has surfaced in the local Brazilian community. Police said Marcilei Caetano, 24, and Joelson G. Fonseca, 21, both formerly of Framingham, were local members of a gang based in Rio de Janeiro "Amigos dos Amigos," or Friends of Friends, also known by its initials A.D.A. The gang is one of three violent criminal organizations that fight over drug trafficking control in Rio's shantytowns. Caetano has been deported to Brazil, and Fonseca, who is in jail on a drug sentence, will follow once he completes his time in prison, said police.

Both men were arrested on July 20, when Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers came to town looking for a Brazilian man who had a warrant for his deportation. Caetano and Fonseca were at an apartment on 277 Concord St., where the operation was taking place, and when neither of them could prove they were legal residents, they were placed in deportation proceedings, said ICE spokeswoman Paula Grenier. Caetano was deported in late September, she said.



Police said they had information about Caetano and Fonseca's gang involvement before their arrests from anonymous sources within the Brazilian community. And after they were detained, police received more information about other illegal activities they were involved in: distribution of drugs, house break-ins, and a home invasion.

The arrests of Caetano and Fonseca bring to light an ongoing investigation police have been conducting on Brazilian gangs that may be responsible for home invasions, house break-ins, robberies and drug trafficking in Framingham, Worcester and Milford. Police said two other Brazilian gangs are active in the community: "Furacao," or Twister, and "Jovem Brazilian Mafia," or Young Brazilian Mafia, also known by its initials in Portuguese, JBM.

Full Story: <http://www.milforddailynews.com/homepage/x9494573>



Detectives Monitor Social Networks for Gang Activity

Article published by the Ventura County Star

11/23/2007 Ventura County, CA | The seedy side of society is no longer limited to street corners and alleys for passing along threats, warnings and tip-offs. Much of it is being done in cyberspace. That's the same electronic universe that chatty youngsters also crack open with passwords, and where they talk about anything and everything with each other or strangers.

Sometimes, they brag about nefarious deeds or cough up the monikers of gang members or criminal suspects. "Kids, they will talk about everything to their friends, and they are very bold about it," said Capt. Ron Nelson with the Ventura County Sheriff's Department. "They throw it up on Myspace.com thinking that nobody will read it (but) Myspace is there for the whole world to see."



As the world is watching and gabbing away, detectives from Ventura County are mining these chat rooms and personal networking Web sites such as Myspace.com and Facebook.com. Police troll for clues, tips or evidence to help them investigate crimes, including homicides, rapes, graffiti vandalism, under-age drinking and other offenses — some of them gang-related, Nelson said. "We use Myspace every day," he said, adding that at least two Sheriff's Department detectives use it as an investigative tool on a daily basis.

Myspace.com is a very popular and personal networking service that is used daily by millions of people. Nelson said Myspace.com officials have cooperated with law enforcement officials who, armed with search warrants, attempt to retrieve information about accounts. About a dozen of the 134 search warrants issued to police in Ventura County since September have been for Myspace.com, Craigslist or Yahoo e-mail accounts. Detectives also troll other Web sites such as eBay.com to get the lowdown on street gossip, learn the monikers of gang members or find out who calls the shots in criminal street gangs or tagging crews, Nelson said.

Full Story: <http://www.venturacountystar.com/news/2007/nov/23/cyberspace-mined-for-crime-data-by-police-social/>

Cabarrus County Schools Consider Policy on Gangs

Article published by the Winston-Salem Journal

11/25/2007 Concord, NC | The Cabarrus County school system is considering its first systemwide policy on preventing gang activity. System attorneys have drafted an anti-gang policy preventing the display of gang clothing, symbols and tattoos. Students are also prohibited from using hand signals, tagging school property with graffiti, recruiting members, and breaking other rules in relation to gang activity.

The proposal strengthens existing behavioral policies and provides parents and schools more information on the symptoms of gang activity, said Jim Amendum, the assistant superintendent for administrative services. The policy is not a matter of disciplining students if they belong to a gang, Amendum said. "But if they are promoting gang behavior either by apparel or actions ... that certainly provides a disruption to the school environment," he said.

The guideline will give schools the go-ahead to contact parents whose children are suspected of gang activity. Further discipline will coincide with existing school policy, leading up to long-term suspension. The board of education approved the policy on first reading Monday. The policy becomes official once approved on second reading.



Though the policy is an active approach to thwarting a community problem, there have been instances in which school property has been tagged with graffiti, Amendum said. He noted that schools photograph graffiti before removing it and, in some cases, the offenders have been caught with the help of cameras. Police have also briefed principals on gang-related symbols and paraphernalia, Amendum said.

School administrators and social workers began sharing information about gangs this fall with local law enforcement and community leaders through Project SAFE Cabarrus, a countywide initiative to prevent crime and gun violence.

Full Story: http://www.journalnow.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=WSJ%2FMGArticle%2FWSJ_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1173353616397&path=/localnews&s=1037645509099



Stuart Program Aims to Deter Potential Gang Trouble

Article published by the Palm Beach Post

11/23/2007 Stuart, FL | Kathleen Lannon knows children who see gang activity on the streets outside their homes. Some of the children know other kids in gangs. Some are only 10 years old. "A lot of it has to do with the media, how it's portrayed, the music that they're listening to," said Lannon, a youth intervention counselor with the Stuart police. "The lyrics are very graphic, and the kids relate to that. They think money gets them power." She hopes to change their minds.

It's with that goal that Stuart police are teaming up with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Martin County to provide a six-week gang awareness and prevention program for fourth- and fifth-graders in East Stuart. Every Monday and Tuesday, the children meet at the city's 10th Street recreation center to learn through lectures and role-playing the signs of gang activity and ways to avoid it.

"Part of the Boys and Girls Club mission is to provide safe spaces and also teach them ways to make the best decisions in their lives," said Suzanne Wentley, a spokeswoman for the Boys & Girls Clubs. "Even at that young of an age, the kids see violence in the streets. They see delinquent behavior and negative peer pressures. "They know the people and the places and the activities that should be avoided," Wentley said. "What they may not know is the best way to do that to remain safe."

Lannon uses a curriculum based on the Phoenix Project, an anti-gang initiative employed in other communities throughout the country. The East Stuart initiative is the first in the state to implement the program in an after-school setting, Lannon said. "We're beginning to see some signs of gang involvement in Stuart and Martin County," Lannon said. "There are growing numbers of minors on street corners wearing the same colors and selling drugs."

Full Story: http://www.palmbeachpost.com/localnews/content/tcoast/epaper/2007/11/23/m1b_stugangs_1123.html



Scams Build Gang Empire

Continued from page 1...

But few of the operations appear as fully evolved as Thompson's. By May 2004, when he was indicted on federal drug conspiracy charges, Thompson controlled at least 15 South Side properties, the Tribune found. Most were clustered within a half-mile of his headquarters at 6901 S. Halsted St. in the Englewood neighborhood. From there, Thompson kept track of his land portfolio using an HP Vectra computer tower equipped with IBM Red Brick Warehouse business software, search warrant receipts show. Two handguns were tucked nearby.

Thompson pleaded guilty to federal drug conspiracy charges in March but denied being the gang's leader in a court statement. He awaits sentencing and faces 10 years to life in prison. Thompson and his attorneys declined to comment.

His collection of South Side properties was the fulfillment of a stubborn dream. Aided by a cadre of lawyers, accountants and mortgage brokers, Thompson began buying buildings in the early 1990s, soon after he allegedly assumed leadership of the gang. A dope supplier introduced Thompson to a real estate broker and loan officer who helped him "start a corporation to facilitate the purchase of real estate in order to launder drug money," federal prosecutors wrote in 2004 court papers. "Thompson wanted to use [secret land trusts] to obtain legitimate bank loans."

In the hands of an honest investor, Thompson's properties could have been worth millions of dollars and might have kindled development in a swath of Englewood struggling to rebuild. Instead, they became ravaged, dangerous shells.

Secret Land Trusts

To understand how dubious mortgages helped generate cash for Thompson and extend his gang's dominion, consider the three-story, 15-unit courtyard apartment building at 6723-29 S. Parnell Ave. Thompson bought the building in a 1995 tax auction, although patchy county land records don't show how much he paid. He then titled the property to a secret land trust using an Illinois law that allows property owners to withhold their identities from public records.



Assisting Thompson in these transactions was attorney Peter Loutos, who helped Thompson acquire at least three other properties using secret land trusts, the Tribune found. Loutos, 73, pleaded guilty to an unrelated investment swindle last year and gave up his law license. He declined to comment for this article.

In 1998, three years after Thompson's land trust acquired the Parnell Avenue building, Thompson sold it to an associate for \$315,000. On paper, at least.

The supposed buyer, a woman named Dishawn King, was the mother of one of Thompson's daughters, court records show. King listed her occupation in court records as manager of Thompson's Royal Improvement Ltd. That company sponsored "courtesy patrols" in the

Englewood neighborhood, the documents said, and was the employer Thompson and Black Disciples associates listed to show court authorities they held legitimate jobs. King, 40, has not been charged with any crime, and she declined to comment.

After Thompson purportedly sold King the Parnell building in 1998, she used it to secure a \$252,000 mortgage loan that went unpaid. It is unclear where that money ultimately ended up, but in a typical mortgage, it would have gone to the seller, Thompson. But Thompson apparently kept his hold on the building. "Thompson, along with his mother, have retained control over that property," an FBI agent wrote in a 2004 court affidavit.

The FBI affidavit cited evidence of Thompson's hidden ownership. Even after he supposedly transferred the building to King, Thompson stated that he owned the property when he collected \$54,941 in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Section 8 payments from October 1999 through March 2004. Thompson said he was the landlord of two government-subsidized tenants there.

On his federal income tax returns for 1999 and 2000, Thompson reported owning the Parnell building and listed income and expenses related to it, the FBI found. The tax preparer who compiled Thompson's tax filings for a decade--and also prepared King's tax returns in 1999 and 2000--explained to FBI agents Thompson's strategy for concealing his ownership. Thompson sold the building to King, the accountant told the FBI. Then Thompson bought it back from her without registering the second sale with the Cook County recorder of deeds.

Adding to the evidence that Thompson still controlled the building was the fact that his mother managed it, even after King took title. Arlether Branch raised Thompson and three siblings as a single mother, then worked for his Royal Improvement as a property manager. She was not charged with any crime, and she did not respond to requests for comment.

When federal agents arrested Thompson on drug conspiracy charges, they searched two apartments he and his mother used in the building. Authorities found bundles of U.S. currency totaling \$313,000, a notebook containing "The Black Disciple Nation Laws" and a box of .380-caliber ammunition. Thompson, the alleged Black Disciples leader, maintained a third apartment's electrical service under the name "Unit BD."

An August 2004 city housing code inspection found cracked mortar and loose brick on the building's exterior. Inspectors reported that they couldn't get inside. Trusted gang members knew the secret. They knocked on an outer door to be led down a set of stairs into the basement, then through a wooden door on the right side of a hallway. There, Thompson had installed a two-room recording studio, court records show.

From a radio antenna on the roof, the Black Disciples broadcast across the South Side by hijacking the frequency of a Christian station. Amid uncensored rap, the gang sent out messages like the one from Sept. 29, 2003: "There was serious surveillance on Parnell, didn't tell us where, just called it in. It was unsuccessful."

Learning the Game

In addition to Thompson's 15 properties, his criminal associates bought property alongside his and used it to obtain mortgage loans. Wholesale drug supplier Willie Diggs owned four nearby South Side parcels, including one used as a key safe house in Black Disciples drug operations, land and court records show. Diggs used his buildings to collect \$365,700 in mortgages that he didn't repay, as well as \$64,376 in Section 8 vouchers, the Tribune found. It's not clear how much of that money Diggs pocketed, or how much he churned into property purchases. Charged in a separate pending federal narcotics case, Diggs did not respond to requests for comment.

An unnamed associate bragged to federal agents about teaching Diggs how to buy property, use mortgage loans and rent profits to acquire drugs, then buy another piece of property and deal more drugs. "This was the best way to do it," the associate told an undercover federal agent.

Jerry Fort, a convicted drug dealer who helped Diggs acquire a building used for drug dealing by the Black Disciples, controlled an additional nine properties that garnered \$571,000 in mortgages and \$181,657 in Section 8 vouchers, the Tribune found. Fort was not charged in the Black Disciples case, and he declined to comment.

A former county employee named Generall J.G. Voker II was convicted of helping the Black Disciples launder profits from the sale of heroin and crack. He owned properties on the South Side and in Kankakee County and Arizona, land records show. Voker was not a Black Disciples member, but his 33-year-old twin sons were mid-level gang leaders who washed drug profits through their father, prosecutors alleged. Voker also was a veteran employee of the Cook County Management of Information Systems department, which helps prepare property tax bills, according to public records. Sentenced to 5 years probation for the money laundering, Voker declined an interview request.

Eviction Notices

Mortgages were not the only income Thompson squeezed from his properties. He leased dozens of shabby apartments to single mothers who paid only a small portion of their rent. The federal Section 8 program paid the rest, giving Thompson at least \$276,951 in housing choice vouchers from January 2000 through December,

records show. Thompson got about \$13,250 of that money after his May 2004 indictment.

Thompson evicted at least 41 slow-paying tenants from his properties between 1998 and last year. In nine of those cases, Thompson's mother and property manager successfully petitioned Cook County Circuit Court judges to appoint special process servers who presented tenants with court notices. Those servers were Black Disciples, the Tribune found. Among them was Thompson's half-brother Curtis "Bay-Bay" Branch, who served state prison stints for drug dealing and for concealing a murder fugitive.

In seven cases, eviction notices were served by Burnie Williams, who has served probation for felony drug delivery charges and a misdemeanor weapons arrest.

When Thompson's mother filed court petitions asking judges to approve special process servers, Thompson was able to help her. He affirmed her signature using an Illinois notary stamp granted to him by the secretary of state in 1997.

Neighborhood Suffers

Eleven of the 15 Thompson properties traced by the Tribune were cited for dangerous housing code violations. Four were demolished after judges ruled that they were public hazards. At Thompson's headquarters building at 6901 S. Halsted St., city inspectors cited broken plaster, peeling paint, smashed windowpanes, rotted window frames and rats. Activity at the building also drove up crime in the neighborhood.

From 1999 through 2003, police made 12 felony drug-dealing arrests on the corner dominated by Thompson's headquarters. A 24-year-old woman convicted of drug dealing outside the building lived in a second-floor apartment there, police and court records show. A 29-year-old Black Disciple was convicted of selling 34 zip-lock bags of marijuana from the corner. And police investigated 78 crimes on the block between 1999 and 2003, including 11 involving guns.

The street crime all but vanished after Thompson was indicted in May 2004. Police records list only one battery and one assault on the block in the final seven months of 2004.

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Glossary of mortgage fraud schemes

AIR LOANS: A swindler invents borrowers and buildings to obtain loans. The perpetrator may set up phones and pose as borrower, employer, appraiser and credit agency when the lender calls to verify.

CHUNKING: A swindler holds a seminar promising to show investors how to get rich buying property with no money down. Using the investors' personal information, the swindler submits multiple mortgage applications, pocketing the loan proceeds.

DOUBLE SALES: Weeks can pass between the filing of a property record and its appearance in computerized registries used by title-search companies. A swindler can record a deed, arrange a loan, and before those transactions show up in the computer, file another deed and arrange another loan.

HOME IMPROVEMENT CONS: A contractor talks the homeowner into making costly or unnecessary repairs. The contractor loans the homeowner money for the job or steers him to a mortgage lender, then has the loan proceeds sent directly to the contractor. When the loan forecloses, the contractor can end up taking the house or part of the sale proceeds from it.

LAND FLIP: Property is purchased, falsely appraised at a higher value, then quickly resold. Some properties are flipped three or four times between associates with no money changing hands.

STRAW OWNER: To apply for a loan, the swindler pays a person, often a friend or relative, for the use of his name and credit history.

Sources: Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council, FBI, Illinois attorney general, Cook County state's attorney's office.

From the Editors

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter.
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