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POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

Shaved Brows Raise Red Flag in High Schools

Article published by the San Francisco Chronicle on May 4, 2008

Gresham, OR | Andy Gonzalez was studying for a science test at Centennial High School, when a school security guard told him to go home. It was his eyebrows, the security guard said. Gonzalez, a Cuban American junior in stylishly baggy clothes, had shaved a vertical line down the center of each eyebrow. They look like a gang symbol, the security guard said, adding, "If you're going to come to school like that, don't come at all."

But Gonzalez, 17, isn't in a gang, he says, and shaved the lines only to look cool. Like other teens, he's sporting the latest fashion trend, particularly among Latino and African American students. Rappers from Vanilla Ice to this year's reigning hip-hop champ, Soulja Boy, have sported shaved brows. But police say gangs have co-opted the trend for their own use. In this case, Gresham police say members of Southside 13, a prominent Portland-area Latino gang, are marking themselves by shaving one line into one eyebrow and three lines in the other to symbolize 13.

"We don't dictate policy for any schools," said Officer David Schmidt of the East Multnomah County Gang Enforcement Team. "We just tell them what we see the latest trends are. This is a way for them to identify each other. In a school setting, it intimidates other kids."

At Centennial, administrators are telling students who shave the lines that they can't return to school until they get rid of them - by shaving their eyebrows off. Four students have been sent home - one came back immediately with a bandage covering the shaved brow. The others are still out of school. Gonzalez is still out of school. He says shaving his eyebrows was a natural progression from the patterns he used to shave in his hair. The lines he shaved above his eyes were meant to impress, not intimidate. "It's just for the ladies," Gonzalez said. "They think it looks cute."

Assistant Principal Mark Porterfield said the students are not suspended, but they are not allowed in school until they cooperate. "We just saw a little of it and reacted to it," Porterfield said. "Just like if a student had gang-related clothing, we want to keep that out of the schools." If Gonzalez wants to return to school - "Of course, I do," he said - he'll have to do something decidedly uncute: Shave the rest of his eyebrows off. "But I don't want to do that," he says. "I'd be humiliated."

Continued…

Students say they are getting different, confusing signals about what is allowed and when they can return. They also say officials have not announced to students the rule or the sanctions for violating it.

Assistant principal Porterfield told junior Jasiel Carmona that he could return if he colored his eyebrows in with makeup, but a security guard told him that wasn't good enough. He'd have to shave them off.

David Fidanque, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon, said schools are required to have clear rules. "Most school districts have general rules that prohibit gang behavior and attire," he said. "What may be viewed as gang behavior can change quickly. There is some leeway, but it can be very tricky because the rules do have to be clear. If a student is going to be suspended or expelled, they need to know what the rule is before they're punished for violating them."

Shaved eyebrows aren't the only fashion trend used as gang symbols, Schmidt said. Teens wear price tags and size stickers on their hats. Schmidt says some use the hat sizes to signify their gang status. But not everyone who wears the tags is in a gang, Schmidt says. Because gang symbols and general fashion can closely resemble each other, Schmidt says, the police look for specific factors.

"Never just one thing identifies a gang member," Schmidt says. "We don't walk up to kids and say, 'Hey, your eyebrow is carved, we're going to mark you as a gang member.' We go by a combination of things. Otherwise, you could have a kid who is wearing blue and maybe just likes blue and doesn't associate it with a gang."

Local

A Clash of Symbols

Article published by the Times

05/11/2008 Munster, IN | To one student, it was "just a star." To Munster High School administrators, the star shaved into the student's hair was a gang symbol and grounds for expulsion. The young man, who requested his name not be published for fear it could hurt job prospects, said he was expelled in March 2007 from Munster High School after a recent transfer from Bishop Noll in Hammond. It was all because of his haircut, which he said school administrators believed to be a gang symbol.

And despite an attempt to explain, and the offer to cut his hair, he said school officials wouldn't listen. "I just didn't see it as a gang sign," said the young man, who is now 18 and on track to graduate May 30 from the Griffith Alternative Program. "I had no idea. I had stars in my hair before. It was no big deal, never had a problem. "(There are) stars on the flag and stars on Converse shoes. It's not what the star means to me."

Weapons, drug dealing, threats and repeat offenses are common grounds for expulsion in several school districts throughout Illinois and Indiana, officials said. But grounds for expulsion in one district might not warrant discipline in another, especially when it comes to gang symbols, and the rules vary in each student handbook. And this young man's situation is one example of gray areas that can exist.

Because student anonymity is legally protected, Munster High School Assistant Principal Mike Wells said he couldn't talk about specific cases. But he said in addition to drugs and weapons, gang issues, symbols and anything that promotes gangs are "not tolerated" and are grounds for expulsion. Students with gang symbols usually admit they know what they mean, he said. "As far as gang issues, we are not concerned whether they are in a gang or not," he said. "The fact they are promoting gang activity is something that cannot be tolerated as well."

Wells said the school officials hope to deter students from making poor decisions. "We want to avoid the expulsion process," he said. "It's not anything we seek out. We always look out for the student and, as administration, we have to look out for the safety of the entire school."

Full Story: ***http://www.nwi.com/articles/2008/05/11/opinion/forum/doc69a0d0815f94117a862574430079581f.txt***

Leaders Aim to Crack Down on Crime Before It Gets Out of Hand

Article published by the Journal & Courier

05/29/2008 Lafayette, IN | In the early '90s, when residents of Historic Ninth Street Hill learned someone was selling drugs out of a home there, neighbors sat nearby and recorded the license plate numbers of vehicles seen leaving the home. "I was mad," Jane Boswell said. "How dare people do that in our nice neighborhood." Now Ninth Street Hill -- and much of Tippecanoe County -- is dealing with illegal drug activity on a larger and more frequent scale. Getting a strong hold on a problem before it worsens is one of the key initiatives behind Project Safe Neighborhoods.

Representatives of law enforcement, local dignitaries, the prosecutor's office and other Tippecanoe County officials came together Wednesday at Duncan Hall to formally introduce the federal anti-crime and anti-gang program. "It's critical that we attack the problem now," said Kathy Redd, an investigator with the prosecutor's office and the Project Safe Neighborhoods' coordinator. "If we don't handle it aggressively, it is quite possible for us to lose this city in three years, according to trends."

Redd, who was raised in Lafayette, has spent the last year researching crime trends and analyzing trouble spots in Tippecanoe County. During a ride-along with the Lafayette Police Department's Street Crimes Unit, she witnessed firsthand suspected cocaine dealers on street corners. After handing out fliers for WeTip, an anonymous hotline residents can call to report illegal activity, she was threatened by suspected gang members.

And in Redd's conversations and meetings with residents, she encountered dozens of people who said they knew of crimes taking place but feared reporting them. "We are facing a problem with safety," Redd said. "We're seeing the degradation of neighborhoods. There is no one person to blame. What Project Safe Neighborhoods is trying to do is mobilize the community -- that's it is up to all of us to fight this."

Project Safe Neighborhoods also has been implemented in Allen, Lake and Saint Joseph counties, said David Capp, interim U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Indiana. Each community was allowed to use the grant -- $53,398 for Tippecanoe County -- to address its most prevalent problem. "I knew there were some growing law enforcement issues in Tippecanoe County. They were seeing an influx of problems from the south side of Chicago and Lake County," Capp said. "We felt this was an area that we should start focusing on."

Boswell, a resident of Historic Ninth Street Hill for more than 30 years, was part of a focus group to inform neighborhoods about the program. Part of Project Safe Neighborhoods includes training rental property owners how to recognize signs and, proactively, better screen applicants before they become tenants.

"We started seeing changes in our neighborhood in the last couple of years," Boswell said. "More and more crimes were being reported. We are a diverse neighborhood with a nice bell-shaped curve of ages and incomes. "But to have gang-related vandalism and gang graffiti, it was very unnerving."

Source: The Journal & Courier

Lafayette Gang Member Gets 32 Years for Dealing Drugs

Information from the Journal and Courier and WLFI

05/10/2008 Lafayette, IN | A West Lafayette man with a 1998 conviction for dealing cocaine was sentenced Friday to 32 years in prison for the same crime. Omar A. Reyes, 31, was arrested in March 2007 with cocaine that had an estimated street value of $13,000 to $14,000, said Tippecanoe County Prosecutor Pat Harrington. He pleaded guilty in October in Tippecanoe Superior Court 2 to dealing cocaine, a Class A felony. The case stems from a March 2007 Tippecanoe County Drug Task Force investigation. Police said officers found drugs, weapons and cash during a search of Reyes' house on Soldier's Home Road.

Harrington said Reyes is a member of the Latin Kings gang. He has tattoos and a "grill" -- a type of decorative jewelry worn over the teeth -- representing the gang. Tippecanoe Superior II Judge Tom Busch found a West Lafayette man's gang affiliation an aggravating factor in sentencing him to 32 years in prison. Reyes is serving probation for the 1998 conviction. The prosecutor's office last fall filed a petition to revoke his probation.

By Truck and Plane, Drugs Cross Borders to Hit Region Streets

Article published by the Times

05/25/2008 Lake County, IN | Whether crammed into hidden compartments in trucks or packed in baggies in the stomachs of airborne couriers, most illegal drugs coming into Northwest Indiana continue to cross the border via Mexican cartels. But as the Lake County Drug Free Alliance releases its 2008 report analyzing what it calls an epidemic of local drug use, federal and local officials say there are new trends in the narcotics underworld.

Asian organized crime groups, for example, have begun growing expensive, high-potency marijuana in Canada and the Pacific Northwest states for distribution throughout the United States, region drug enforcement agents say. And Columbian cartels have begun partnering with Mexican smugglers, who forgo the traditional South American smuggling methods of commercial airlines and cruise ships in favor of land transport, particularly in trucks, cars, buses and trains.

However federal officials are disputing perceptions in some local law enforcement communities that more heroin is entering the region from Afghanistan. "I've heard that perception, and I'm at a loss to explain it," said Dennis Wichern, head of Indiana's Drug Enforcement Administration office. "You've got to test the samples like we do. ... The numbers that we've seen don't bear it out."

The federally funded Lake County High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area task force says in its most recent report in June that the region's drug trends are tied to Chicago. "Chicago-based Mexican DTOs (drug trafficking organizations) have expanded their drug trafficking operations into neighboring Lake County," the report says. "Mexican DTOs provide local street gang members and independent dealers with a steady supply of wholesale quantities of cocaine, heroin and marijuana."

Full Story: ***http://www.nwi.com/articles/2008/05/25/news/top_news/doc4fe404bcf36f4e7d86257453007ee128.txt***

Gang Shooting Suspect has Prior Conviction

Article published by the Times

05/05/2008 Hammond, IN | For Lee Smith, the description of the late April shooting near the Hammond Career Center sounded eerie. And not just because the incident occurred after two groups of people reportedly threw around gang-related hand gestures. It's that 26-year-old Joseph Shell -- one of the men accused of firing a .38 caliber revolver on April 24 while in a sport-utility vehicle near the intersection of Sohl Avenue and Carroll Street -- is the same man who was charged and convicted in connection with the 2001 shooting death of Smith's son in Lansing. "I felt like I was reading the exact same thing all over again," Smith said.

Shell, of Hammond, is free on bond after posting $10,945 Tuesday, according to court records. He is scheduled to appear May 14 for an initial hearing in Lake County court on two counts of attempted murder and one count of resisting law enforcement in connection with the Hammond shooting that injured two men. A second man, 27-year-old Mark D. Olszewski, who has addresses in the 900 block of Greenbay Avenue in Calumet City and the 7300 block of McCook Avenue in Hammond, faces the same charges in connection with the Hammond shooting.

In November 2002, a then-21-year-old Shell was found guilty for causing the July 28, 2001, death of the then-18-year-old Cody Smith, an acquaintance from Thornton Fractional South High School in Lansing. According to court records, Cody Smith was driving with two friends on Ridge Road through downtown Lansing when they pulled up next to Shell's car. The boys disliked Shell because of reputed gang ties, and the two groups reportedly had been feuding for years, according to accounts given to The Times in 2001.

At one point Smith and his two friends followed Shell's car and an altercation in a Ridge Road parking lot was followed by gunshots, one of which fatally struck Smith. Shell, who said he acted in self-defense, was charged with four counts of aggravated unlawful use of a firearm, illegal weapon possession and gang violence. In December 2002, Cook County Circuit Judge Frank Zelezinski convicted Shell on the charges and sentenced him to 30 days of community service, 30 months of probation and one year of intensive probation.

Feds: Gang Arrest Just the Most Recent in Suburbs

Article published by the Times

05/26/2008 Harvey, IL | For the better part of a year, federal investigators tracked Isaiah Hicks' movements. They listened to cell phone calls, made undercover drug buys and at one point trailed his girlfriend from Chicago to suburban Harvey, where the reputed Gangster Disciple had set up a safe house. Federal officials say 32-year-old Hicks, along with 19 co-defendants, was arrested Wednesday and remains in federal custody pending a detention hearing scheduled for Tuesday. He isn't the first person accused of leading a sale operation out of the suburbs. But federal officials and experts said Hicks probably won't be the last and simply is the latest to migrate to the suburbs, something that has been going on for the better part of 15 years.

Jim Wagner said law-abiding suburban residents shouldn't be surprised to learn their neighbors are running a drug operation via a cell phone and an Internet connection out of their home. "For a lot of the drug leaders, they want to get into a better lifestyle for themselves, and many of them have families so they move to better housing and move to safer communities," said Wagner, who heads the Chicago Crime Commission and likened the process to young business executives rising through the ranks from a city apartment dweller to a homeowner in the suburbs. "That's exactly the attitude," he said. "Just like anyone else rising in their economic status. You try to make the environment better for you and your family. "They would prefer to enjoy the open space, so to speak. They are keeping a low profile and trying to stay off the law enforcement radar screen."

One apparent example is Kevin "Chocolate" Carter, an alleged kilo-level drug dealer who moved out of Gary's Glen Park neighborhood into Schererville's Foxwood Estates subdivision. Don Rospond, the lead agent in charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration office in Merrillville, said Carter maintained a rental property business with scores of Gary houses, which could have explained to neighbors the $160,000 Bentley convertible and the flashy diamond jewelry.

After a four-year investigation into a drug distribution ring, federal agents arrested Carter in January at his Foxwood Drive home. He has pleaded not guilty and is scheduled to appear Tuesday in federal court in Hammond.

Wagner said logic might take away some of the surprise for suburban residents. "It's not unique," he said. "Some have families they are trying to provide for, and they want their children to go to good schools and live in a better environment."

Law enforcement plays a role in fostering migration as well. In Chicago, high-level gang members and drug dealers face intense scrutiny from police, the FBI and other federal agencies, said Don Soranno, an assistant special agent in charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in Chicago. "You have every federal and local acronym in the city working on gang, drug and gun issues," he said. "These guys then move out to an area where there might not be as much enforcement. "They are removing themselves to insulate themselves from what is going on. It creates a distance and a comfort zone."

According to an in-depth study released this month by the Lake County Drug Free Alliance, the distance may only grow. The study, presented as an inaugural epidemiological profile of Lake County for the Drug Free Alliance, said there is a movement afoot by the region's estimated 2,500 gang members to spread drug trafficking activities to suburban communities in eastern and southern Lake County and neighboring Porter County.

The Crime Commission's Wagner said the strategy comes in part thanks to the almighty dollar. "In the suburbs, there is likely to be more disposable income for people to purchase their products -- whatever their drug of choice is," he said. "The trend is pretty obviously going to continue to move into the suburban areas. "Wherever the product can be sold is where they are going to go. Most small towns have already seen it, and I think it going to continue."

Full Story: ***http://www.nwi.com/articles/2008/05/26/news/illiana/doc803b5306f90ac4498625745400814582.txt***

Gangs' Criminal Networks Extend Into Suburbs

Article published by CBS 2

05/07/2008 Chicago, IL | Much of the deadly violence on Chicago's streets is tied to gangs. CBS 2's Dana Kozlov reports their criminal networks now extend beyond the city as the FBI focuses more of it resources on rounding them up.

Jose Manteca, 36, saw it manner of violence first-hand as a member of a Chicago street gang. He was shot in the head, beaten, arrested and did time – and it was the only life he knew growing up in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. "These were kids and adults that I knew and I respected and admired so it was an easy fit for me," said Manteca, who got out of the gang in his 20s. "I don't think I was ever scared of dying, I was more concerned about what if I lived?" Manteca said.

That's the conversation he tries to have now with current gang members, many of whom are all too familiar with the violence on Chicago's streets. According to the Chicago crime commission, there are between 75 and 125 Chicago street gangs with up to 125,000 members. In 2006, there were 468 murders in Chicago -- many of them gang-related -- compared with 480 in the much larger city of Los Angeles and 596 in New York.

Experts say none of this is new. What is new are the numbers of gang members in the suburbs and the types of crimes committed. "They're flourishing and they're becoming smarter at the same time," said Jim Wagner of the Chicago Crime Commission. "And that makes them even more dangerous than before."

"Twenty years ago, the FBI here in Chicago, we weren't working street gangs," said Bill Monroe of the FBI's Chicago bureau. But Monroe, an FBI gang expert, says the bureau now has three squads devoted solely to gang activity to try and limit their reach. "There's probably three or four major gangs, and those are the gangs that go beyond the city of Chicago, they go beyond the suburbs, they go across state lines, and those three or four or five gangs, those are the ones we place big emphasis on," Monroe said.

Source: CBS 2 News

Huge Narcotics Probe Nets Gang 'Prince' in Chicago

Article published by the Chicago Sun-Times

05/30/2008 Chicago, IL | For the past two years feared West Side gang leader "Shakey" Shawn Betts would hole up for a week at a time in his St. Charles home even as he kept close watch over his unusually organized drug empire in Chicago. All the while, Chicago cops listened to his phone calls, bought his dope on street corners and watched as he snuck in and out of high-level gang meetings at a hardware store on West Madison.

This week, Betts and his notorious "Body Snatchers" faction of the Four Corner Hustlers street gang were taken down in one of the largest Chicago Police Department narcotics investigations ever. Seventy-five gang members were named in warrants, and 55 had been arrested by Thursday. Betts, considered a "prince" in the Four Corner Hustlers, was arrested in his home Wednesday.

Several other high-ranking gang members were arrested, including convicted murderer and Four Corner Hustler "chief" Gregory Brown and Leroy "Soap" Palmer, a member of the Black Souls street gang who allegedly supplied drugs to Betts and was arrested at his Austin home with three handguns and an assault rifle. He's already been locked up eight times for charges ranging from manslaughter to burglary.

"We took down the hierarchy," said Narcotics Cmdr. Nick Roti. "The people who are hard to take off the street because they are very insulated. We had them from the very top."

The investigation was launched in 2006 after crime numbers in the Austin District showed just how deadly Betts' organization was. In 2005 when Betts was locked up in an Illinois prison, the district saw a record drop in homicides. In 2006 — the same year Betts was released and allegedly reestablishing himself — the homicides

jumped by six. “Both vicious and indiscriminate, the Body Snatchers are responsible for many shootings and homicides that plagued the West Side," said Frank Limon, the chief of Organized Crime.

Officers from the narcotics, gang intelligence and asset forfeiture sections listened to 22,000 phone calls and made 100 undercover buys at six drug spots Betts allegedly ran. Police say he controlled 75 percent of drug and gang activity in the Austin district.

Betts’ drug business —augmented by the sale of stolen cigarettes and morphine —stretched into the Harrison and Grand Central districts and allegedly brought in between $3,000 and $6,000 a week.

Betts, described as cocky and cautious, ran an organization noted for being highly structuredsimilar to Larry Hoover’s Gangster Disciples. Such gang hierarchies have broken down in recent years as smaller neighborhood factions have emerged. “Shawn Betts was feared, and still is, on the streets,” Roti said. “That’s why he was able to control these spots."

Source: The Sun-Times

Cops Fume at Parade for Gang Leader

Article published by the Sun-Times

05/28/2008 Chicago, IL | The Fraternal Order of Police is fuming about the city's decision to grant a permit that paved the way for a Memorial Day weekend march honoring the birthday of David "King David" Barksdale, founder of the Gangster Disciples street gang.

The parade along South Ashland Avenue in the Englewood neighborhood was held Saturday, apparently without incident. Chicago Police officers assigned to the event were forewarned to expect trouble because the Gangster Disciples have "strong ties" to another major street gang.

"Officers should be aware that the aforementioned gangs have historical and current conflict with other rival gangs as well as some factions experiencing internal conflict. Therefore, officers assigned to the area of the parade should be aware that the possibility of gang violence exists," said a May 22 advisory from the police Bureau of Strategic Deployment.

FOP President Mark Donahue was incredulous that City Hall allowed it to happen. "It's an insult. This is a violent street gang credited with multiple murders and chaos within communities. All residents in areas where they are located should be offended," he said.

Police Department spokeswoman Monique Bond said the permit to hold an "anti-violence march" was granted by the Office of Emergency Management and Communications to a group known as "House of David, Put Down the Guns, Put on the Gloves."

"It's an anti-violence group very similar to groups like CeaseFire. They use their life experiences to deter youth from going down the wrong path," she said.

Bond insisted that there was "nothing in the permit that indicated criminal activity or a threat." Why, then was a police advisory issued three days before the event?

"Intelligence was gathered late Thursday that indicated that this group may have involved former gang members. Once we got word that former gang members late in age may be in attendance, necessary precautions were put into place," she said.

Source: The Sun-Times

Two Teens Charged in Aurora Shooting Incident

Article published by the Chicago Tribune

05/20/2008 Chicago, IL | Two teens have been charged in a gang-related shooting near East Aurora High School, where police stepped up patrols Tuesday after a 15-year-old girl escaped injury, authorities said.

Initially, police believed that four teenagers taken into custody after shots were fired Monday in Phillips Park had targeted the girl, who was exercising with her gym class by walking on a track around Mastodon Lake. But after investigating, police determined that the shots were directed at a rival gang member parked nearby.

A 14-year-old boy was charged with unlawful discharge of a firearm within 1,000 feet of a school and unlawful use of a weapon. A 16-year-old boy was charged with unlawful use of a weapon.

Source: The Chicago Tribune

Man Slain in Gang-Related Shooting on South Side

Article published by the Sun-Times

05/27/2008 Chicago, IL | An internal gang dispute left an alleged gang member who was a parolee fatally shot Monday night in the South Shore neighborhood on the South Side, police said. Police responded to a call of shots fired about 7:42 p.m. Monday and found a man lying on the street suffering from multiple gunshot wounds at 7822 S. Essex Ave. The man had been shot in the face, chest and back, according to South Chicago District police Capt. Richard Johnson.

Frederick Hogan, 27, of the 7800 block of S. Marquette Ave., was pronounced dead at Northwestern Memorial Hospital at 8:20 p.m., a spokesman for the Cook County Medical Examiner's office said. He was involved in a previous altercation within the street gang he was allegedly a member of, which led to Monday night's slaying, police News Affairs Officer David Banks said. Hogan was allegedly a known member of the P-Stones street gang and had 45 arrests on his record, Johnson said.

Officers reported "a lot" of people were on the scene of the shooting, but everyone "claimed not to have seen anything," Johnson said.

Source: The Sun-Times

11 Guards, 7 Inmates Injured in Cook County Jail Brawl

Article published by the Chicago Tribune

05/14/2008 Chicago, IL | Eleven Cook County correctional officers and seven county jail inmates were injured Tuesday morning in a gang-related fight involving more than 40 inmates in a yard at the Cook County Jail, a sheriff's office spokeswoman said.

The brawl broke out about 9:15 a.m. outside Division 1, a maximum security wing in the sprawling jail complex near 26th Street and California Avenue, sheriff's office spokeswoman Penny Mateck said.

"It was essentially a fistfight that grew to involve some 40 inmates," Mateck said, adding that about 180 inmates who were outside at the time were not involved in the fight.

Of the seven inmates who were injured, five were treated on the scene and two were taken to Stroger Hospital, she said. While trying to break up the fight, which did not involve weapons, the officers suffered minor injuries. Most were treated at the scene or in the jail's hospital, Mateck said. Jail officials and the sheriff's office were investigating the fight.

Source: The Chicago Tribune

Ties to Gangs Can Develop at Early Age

Article published by the Times

05/13/2008 Chicago, IL | Drug money. Drive-by shootings. More than 24 students dead. In parts of Chicago, gangbangers control the streets, scaring neighbors with fights and gunfire. Even though gang members make up a small minority of the population in even the most affected neighborhoods, the violence and underlying organization of gangs have created a citywide menace.

In 2006, the Chicago Crime Commission worked with the Chicago Police Department, Chicago Public Schools, the FBI and other experts to publish "The Gang Book," an exhaustive guide to Chicago street gangs.

Last month, Medill News Service sat down with James Wagner, the commission's president.

Medill Reports: The police have effectively broken up the leadership of some major gangs in recent years, including the Black Disciples, who once dominated the Randolph Towers public housing complex. Has this broken up gang culture in impacted neighborhoods?

James Wagner: I think it is a bit of a misunderstanding of the way (gangs) work to believe that just because the leader is in jail that he no longer has any influence. (Breaking up the leadership) has to be done. You have to attempt to arrest and convict those people. But you cannot believe that that's removed the problem.

In all of these gangs, there are younger people ready to take (the leader's) place. There is too much money and power to be had, and so a younger person will take the chance that he's next in line to be prosecuted, because he gets to be in charge.

There are examples in Chicago where gang members have recruited 7- and 8-year-olds to carry guns and to carry drugs. We're talking second- and third-graders. And in most instances schools don't do anything (to teach gang prevention) in those grades.

MR: How do gang members choose which kids to recruit? Why do they pick one kid over another kid?

JW: In many cases it's a relative of one of the members -- it's somebody they know. It's just not a stranger most of the time. And the enticement for these youngsters in some instances would be $100 to carry a gun or carry a bag of drugs. And that's a huge amount of money for a second-grader or a third-grader.

MR: After a second-grader receives his $100 for carrying a gun, what's the next step for him in the gang hierarchy?

JW: If the youngster does a good job with carrying whatever, they'll continue to use him. He'll be a mule. He'll be a carrier. And he'll transport the drugs from one spot to another.

Usually they won't utilize him for sales because they wouldn't initially trust him to get the money for the drugs and bring it back -- he could be so easily ripped off by an adult. But to carry it from one spot to another is an easy job.

And our court system -- we don't prosecute 7- and 8-year-olds, so (gang leaders) know that if a youngster is caught with a gun or with a bag of drugs, they're not going to get prosecuted.

MR: At what age would a kid start selling drugs?

JW: It's not normal until they get to either teenage or just preteen -- 12 or 13. And a lot of that depends on the street smarts of the kid. If you have one that's savvy and a little bit larger perhaps than other 12-year-olds -- maybe he looks 16 or 17 ... they might have him sell.

MR: But these kids don't make much money when they're selling, do they?

JW: No, they don't. But it's more than they could make someplace else. It's more than they would get at McDonald's selling fries.

Source: The Times

York Turns Anti-Gang Initiative to Elementary Schools

Article published by the York Dispatch

05/20/2008 York, PA | Some York City children are being recruited into street gangs at such a young age that police are planning to take their anti-gang education to elementary schools next year. Children as young as 8 years old have been identified as gang members, and efforts to stop middle school students from joining gangs may come too late, said York City Police Officer Tim Shermeyer, of the department's anti-gang USA Squad. "We're going to start targeting the younger kids," said Shermeyer. "Last year we targeted middle school kids and didn't have too much luck with it."

About 300 people have been identified as street gang members in York City; a program called GRIPE, which stands for Gang Reduction through Intervention, Prevention and Education, is working to educate children about the dangers of joining a gang, Shermeyer said.

The program is run by East Coast Gang Investigators Association Inc., and Shermeyer has already been certified as an expert on street gangs by the association. Shermeyer spoke about the program at a community meeting Monday night at St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church in York City, after he was invited by members from the church's youth committee.

The church operates a youth center, and Charlie Bollinger, director of the program, said the youth committee decided it would be a good idea to ask city police to brief them about street gangs in the city. Some gang members have attended the youth center, and two people involved in a gang-related shooting last year in the city have also participated at the center, Bollinger said. While most gang members do not come to the youth center, Bollinger said he thought it was a good idea for other church members to learn about gang activity in the area.

In addition to national gangs, such as the Bloods, in York City, Shermeyer said there are a number of local gangs, including the South Side Cannons, West Side, Teq 9, the Hard Knock Boys, Poplar Street Boyz, and even some female gangs, such as the Lady Gunnaz. Shermeyer discussed some of the clothing items and gang colors that police often use to identify gang members, such as hats for sporting teams.

Shermeyer said the key to keeping kids away from gangs is reaching them young, because once children get involved in gangs they often withdraw from other activities, their families and often do not go to school.

Some church members said they were surprised by the size and organization of the gangs. "I think we got our eyes opened," said Bob Yeater, chairman of the church's youth committee.

Source: The York Dispatch

Measure Targets Net Gang Threats in California

Article published by the Californian

05/03/2008 Salinas, CA | As more Salinas-area teens find themselves targeted in threatening online videos, a resolution pending in the California Legislature would join a growing campaign urging social networking Web sites to crack down on violent postings. The resolution calls on the popular YouTube, MySpace and Facebook sites to remove violent videos and work with law enforcement on criminal postings, while asking Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to set up a task force to recommend ways to prevent them from reaching the Web.

Assembly Concurrent Resolution 106 comes as part of a national effort to make the Internet safer for children. The push originated in an agreement between MySpace and 49 state attorneys general - including California's Jerry Brown. ACR 106 would be nonbinding if passed, but YouTube said it welcomes the efforts to address safety issues.

"We are supportive of the concept of industry, advocacy groups and the attorneys general sitting down and working through the feasibility of age verification" in addressing child safety, YouTube said, "and we would be happy to sit down with Assemblyman Nava or his staff."

But finding a solution to gangs using the Internet to promote violence is a complicated process facing tricky Constitutional issues of free speech, intellectual property and the property rights of site operators.

Violence triggered

Paul Seave, the state's anti-gang director, said it's better for networking sites to address the problem of violent videos themselves, because they have more flexibility than government. In an e-mail statement, YouTube said it doesn't allow real violence on its site. It reviews postings flagged by users as inappropriate for possible removal.

But violent videos from rival gangs continue to threaten local teenagers. One video available on YouTube on Friday, shows a picture of seven teenagers labeled as members of the Fremont Street gang, a Norteño affiliate. One of the teens is named and targeted with the number 187, the California penal code for murder. The video has been viewed nearly 30,000 times in the six months since it was uploaded.

A number of similar videos can be found on YouTube. Their threats need to be taken very seriously, said Brian Contreras, executive director of the Second Chance youth program in Salinas. Several fights and arguments have occurred in Salinas over the past month as a result of videos posted on YouTube and MySpace, he said. "We need to hold these companies accountable," Contreras said. "These kids don't realize that the videos can lead to violence."

Parents responsible

Contreras, who has worked with at-risk youth for more than 20 years, said part of the solution is making parents responsible for monitoring their teenagers' activities, supervising what pages they visit and checking their MySpace profiles. He also urged parents to seek help if they come across something they don't understand - a number, word or gesture that could be a gang symbol.

Even if a teenager is not actually involved in gangs, they can engage in gang-like behavior online, Contreras said. Such "Net bangers" are not aware how dangerous it can be to upload a threatening video. "They are creating problems," Contreras said. "They have no clue what the gang lifestyle is like. They are putting others in danger, and they don't realize it."

Source: The Californian

Gang Selling Drugs to Cal State San Marcos Students Next to Campus

Article published by Fox 6 News

05/08/2008 San Marcos, CA | About a dozen members of a San Diego street gang have moved north to a luxury apartment complex next to Cal State San Marcos and are dealing drugs to its students, it was reported Thursday. San Diego County Sheriff's Department officials said the gang members are selling marijuana, methamphetamine and Ecstasy, The North County Times reported.

"There appears to be a contingent of gang members from San Diego who have relocated to the area around (Cal State San Marcos)," Sgt. Gary Floyd of the sheriff's San Marcos narcotic and gang detail told the Times. "I think as long as these folks are up here, we still have concerns," he added.

The news of drugs on the North County college campus comes just days after more than 120 people, most of them students, were arrested in connection with a yearlong undercover drug operation at San Diego State University. Many of the students arrested on suspicion of dealing drugs belong to fraternities, prompting university officials to suspend six fraternities this week pending a hearing into their alleged involvement in the drug dealing.

In San Marcos, authorities have made seven arrests since late February of suspected gang members or associates of the gang on drug, parole and aggravated assault charges in the area around Prominence Luxury Apartment Homes, the Times reported. Unlike the frat houses at SDSU, the apartment complex next to Cal State San Marcos is not technically affiliated with the university and so Cal State officials cannot police it.

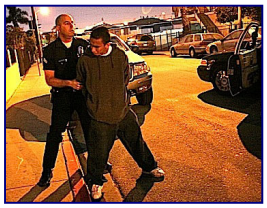
Villaraigosa Wants to Use Gun Restrictions, Databases to Take on Gangs

Article published by the Los Angeles Times

05/30/2008 Los Angeles, CA | Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa on Thursday unveiled plans to target gangs and guns -- including confiscating cars used in gang-related crimes -- with a series of new city ordinances. The mayor proposed giving landlords the power to evict tenants convicted of using and possessing illegal weapons and ammunition. And he promised to push other new laws to regulate the purchase of ammunition and storage of weapons.

The proposed ordinances include banning .50-caliber, military-style ammunition; licensing ammunition vendors; requiring gun-store owners to make regular gun inventories and report to local law enforcement; and outlawing installation of secret gun compartments in vehicles. "We're upping the ante," Villaraigosa said.

Chuck Michel, an attorney who represents the National Rifle Assn. and California Rifle Assn., called the mayor's proposals "a rehash." "The bottom line is that the majority of these proposals have either been tried and failed elsewhere because they don't focus on the criminal or they are covered by proposed bills still being vetted by the Legislature," he said. Michel added that a recent ruling drastically limits individual cities from regulating guns and ammunition.



Villaraigosa called for federal legislation that would include micro-stamping every bullet produced in the United States. Working with Councilman Jack Weiss, the mayor also proposed a measure to require that sales of ammunition in Los Angeles occur face to face, not over the Internet.

So far this year 670 people have been victims of guns crimes, and 70% of all shootings were gang-related, according to the Los Angeles Police Department.

Because landlords might fear retaliation from gang members, the city's legal team will work to force suspects who illegally possess weapons and ammunition out of their homes, City Atty. Rocky Delgadillo said. "We're going to step into the shoes of the landlord and do the eviction on their behalf," he said.

Still, one attorney with the ACLU of Southern California warned that some of the proposals, particularly the move to seize vehicles used in gang crimes, could harm innocent relatives of gang members. "Taking away the family car or putting the family out on the street because one kid has gotten involved in gangs doesn't help the family in the long run," said ACLU staff attorney Peter Bibring.

Source: The Los Angeles Times

From the Editors

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. We are always trying to improve the quality and effectiveness of our newsletters and information.

If you have any comments, suggestions or articles that can be used in the "G.A.I.N." Newsletter, please send them to:

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