

LAW & JUSTICE

Plan Addresses Local Gang Violence

With 'Operation Cool Down'

Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, the elected official who recently took over management of the Portland Police Bureau, announced the creation of a multi-agency mission Thursday to respond to an increase in gang-related violence in the community.

Called "Operation Cool Down," the mission will focus government resources and enforcement on individuals and neighborhoods affected by gang violence.



Dan Saltzman



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Gang outreach officer John Canda tries to get parents involved in the lives of gang-affiliated young people. The community outreach on Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard followed several weeks of gang shootings and homicides from Portland to Gresham.

Representatives from Portland Police Bureau, Gresham Police Department, Multnomah County District Attorney's Office, and the United State Attorney's Office will be coordinating their efforts with the Portland Office of Youth Violence Prevention, members of the faith community, social service agencies, and citizen volunteers.

During the mission, community members will see enhanced patrols by officers from the Portland Police Gang Enforcement Team, HotSpot Enforcement Action Team, the East Metro Gang Enforcement Team, Multnomah County Parole and Probation and Metropolitan Gang Task Force.

The improved coordination between law enforcement gang prevention efforts is meant to provide young people who are at risk of gang affiliation with alternatives that steer them away from acts of violence.

Recognizing that this program will not permanently solve the longstanding problem of gang violence, Saltzman said is in the process of seeking long-term solutions to combat the violence that plagues our communities.

L.A. Goes after Gangs' Money

Assets go to repair neighborhoods

(AP) -- The gang capital of the world is taking a new tack against them: cash damages.

The city of Los Angeles, plagued by 23,000 violent gang crimes since 2004, including 784 murders and 12,000 felony assaults, announced last week that it had won its first civil judgment, for \$5 million, against a criminal gang that had dominated the heroin trade downtown for decades.

The verdict could bode well for another first-of-its-kind lawsuit the city filed last month that goes after all assets of gang leaders, not just those associated with their criminal activity. Both suits seek to plow the money back into improving the neighborhoods affected by the gangs through a fund.

"By giving prosecutors more tools to fight gang activity at the local level, we are protecting our

If you break the law, we will not only find you, arrest you, and put you behind bars, we will also take away your money, your property, your homes, and your cars.

-- Rocky Delgadillo, Los Angeles city attorney



Joshua Lynch, 12, holds a sign at an anti-gang rally in Geensboro, N.C.

communities at the same time [that] we're able to strengthen our statewide anti-gang efforts," said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in a statement released with the announcement of the \$5 million verdict against the 5th and Hill gang in L.A.

The civil suits were filed under different amendments to state laws, one passed in 2007 and one in 2008, designed to strengthen authorities' ability to control gangs. The 2007 amendment allows law enforcement to seize assets associated with criminal conduct. But the 2008 law goes even further -- it allows prosecutors to collect damages from gang members' personal assets, too.

The December suit against the 18th Street gang is the first to make use of the 2008 amendment.

"We're sending a message to gang leaders across this city," said City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo at a press conference last month. "If you break the law, we will not only find you, arrest you, and put you behind bars, we

will also take away your money, your property, your homes, and your cars. Every penny we strip away will be returned to the neighborhoods."

The tactic of trying to cripple organizations by taking away their assets has been commonly used against the mafia. More recently, it has been used against white supremacist organizations. In 2000, the Southern Poverty Law Center won a \$6.3 million verdict against the Aryan Nations that forced the organization to give up its 20-acre compound in Idaho.



Transit Cop Pleads Not Guilty

Wanda Johnson (right), mother of Oscar Grant, leaves an Oakland, Calif., courtroom, Thursday, after Bay Area Rapid Transit police officer Johannes Mehserle was arraigned for murder in the shooting death of her son.

(AP) -- The former Oakland, Calif. transit police officer charged with murder in the shooting of an unarmed black man on New Year's Day pleaded not guilty Thursday.

The attorney for Johannes Mehserle, 27, entered the plea on his client's behalf in an Alameda County courtroom, where Mehserle was kept behind a glass partition, out of view to most people during the 10-minute hearing.

Sheriff's deputies escorted Mehserle's relatives into the courtroom, which was filled with family members and supporters of the victim, 22-year-old Oscar Grant. The Mehserle family has reported receiving several death threats since the shooting.

Prosecutors say Mehserle was standing over Grant, who was lying facedown and restrained on a train platform, when the Bay Area Rapid Transit officer fired one shot into the man's back.

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