

Hell in the City

continued **▲** from front

Involved in all levels of street crime; drug sales, robbery, rape, assaults, theft, burglary, vandalism, graffiti and homicide, police identify gangsters by self-admission and associations, clothing colors; red, blue, orange, etc., tattoos, hand-signs, and crimes committed.

Unlike past generations of gangsters, today's acts of violence are less about protection of turf and wearing opposing colors.

These days, young kids release bullets instead of punches, shoot in broad daylight, and end lives to end fights that may start as minor disagreements or misunderstandings between friends.

"Back then, it was about turf and drugs. Right now it's about a gun war," said former Woodlawn Park gang member and outspoken community advocate, Nicky Taylor.

Unlike gangs in larger cities where territory is a main concern, Portland area gangsters show themselves to be fluid and more transient in nature. They move all over the city, in private cars, on public transit and with friends, expanding their battlefield to parks, malls, churches, residencies and funerals from St. Johns in north Portland to 162nd and Division in south-east Portland.

Mobility of gangs make it difficult for police to track, and with a greater geography to cover, gang enforce-

ments' thin resources spread thinner.

Gang-related shootings are often tricky to solve and few arrests are made due to the pervasive culture of silence surrounding the gang community.

"There are individuals who know who the perpetrators are," said African-American community activist Rev. Roy Tate of Christ Memorial Church, "They need to step forward and point them out."

Gangs achieve neighborhood takeover when they instill fear into people not talking to the police, effectively keeping witnesses, family members, and friends of victims and suspects silent, and cases unsolved.

"As long as people remain silent, this is going to continue to go on," said Tate.

Police can make it difficult for gangs to operate by patrolling hot spots and locking up criminals, but the real battle in breaking the cycle of violence is up to the community, on the home front.

"We can't arrest our way out of this problem," said Simpson of the Portland Police.

As summer approaches, community members fear the violence will escalate, "The sun is going to come out and bullets are going to start flying," said Taylor. "These kids don't have anything to do, so they're driving around looking for trouble."

Peaceful Future

continued **▲** from front

spent six months in jail, and has attended 40 funerals in her lifetime and throughout her involvement with gangs.

Today, Taylor has turned her life around. She wrote a book, "Ask Nicky... A Young Person's Workbook for Building Dreams," to help young people learn the truth about gang life and offer alternatives.

Like many parents of the community, tired of burying friends and family as a result of gang violence, Taylor wants to call a truce among all sides and colors and tell kids to put the guns down.

Concerned for the safety and future of a young generation susceptible to gang recruitment and violence, Taylor asks parents and the community to bring their children to a rally for peace on Saturday, June 18.

The "Family Truce GBA (Guilty by Association)" event will take place from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Irving Park where community members will gather and hear speakers.

"It's going to take the entire community to break this cycle of violence," said community activist Rev. Roy Tate of Christ Memorial Church. Roy says too many members of

the younger generation involved in gangs have no fear of death or don't feel like they have anything to live for.

"They don't think about living for the future, getting a job, saving for retirement or raising families, Tate said, "They are just thinking about today - they don't care about tomorrow."

Growing up under the influence of gangs, Taylor says, she and others didn't have anybody that could tell them they've 'been there done that,' and persuade them from turning away from gangs and towards a more positive atmosphere.

"If we want to see change, the younger generations need help in realizing that their lives are valuable," said Tate. Now is the opportunity for everybody to speak up and show your presence that violence is not the key.

Community leaders involved in organizing the Family Truce rally are invited to attend a meeting on Wednesday, June 15 at 11 a.m. at Reflections Coffee House, 446 N.E. Killingsworth St., to formulate plans for the gathering and decide future plans for action.

For questions or more information e-mail Nicky Taylor at taylornicolew2@gmail.com.

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