

Efforts to End Gang Violence Grow

Eleven-45 movement and task force gain strength

By Helen Silvis
Of *The Skanner News*

The 11:45 initiative, which mobilizes volunteers to support Portland youth and families, is expanding. More pastors are bringing their congregations to the table, and more than 400 volunteers have signed up. At the same time, the city and county's youth violence prevention efforts have gained new programs and staff.

"11:45 has just taken off to such a degree that it is out-running us," said Pastor George Merriweather at an 11:45 community event, Jan. 20, at Life Change Christian Center. "So we realized that we have to strengthen our existing structure and add some new structure. We also want to strengthen our volunteer base."

Merriweather was one of five church leaders who created 11:45 last year in response to an increase in violent crimes involving young people. The plan was to mobilize 100 volunteers who would commit to offering 45 minutes of their time every week for one year. About 400 people answered that initial call, with more than 300 signing up to mentor youth.

Now, 11:45 is adding more church communities and a website, Eleven45.org where you can sign up to join the effort. They also have a twitter stream @Eleven45pdx and a Facebook page. Each participating church is now to have a point person, and the group has a dedicated communications and support volunteer. The next quarterly 11:45 community event will be from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., April 20, at the Northeast Community Fellowship, 636 N.E. Stanton. Visit the website to get involved sooner.

11:45 Awards and Achievements

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Columbia Northwest hon-

A Boost for Violence Prevention Efforts

Portland's gang task force gained some new faces Jan. 20 at the Northeast police precinct on Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd and N.E.

Killingsworth St. The task force meets every second Friday at 10 a.m. Antoinette Edwards, now leading the Office of Youth Violence Prevention, introduced key players, who will be spearheading new efforts to support families and keep youth out of the justice system.

Rebecca Stavenjord, coordinator of Multnomah County's new STRYVE program introduced staff members. Funded through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control, STRYVE will help coordinate community prevention work. Stavenjord vows to keep community members front and center of the work.

"We want this to be an authentic community process and we want it to be infused with the strength that already exists in the community," she told *The Skanner News*.

So far STRYVE has hired Lane Community College student Derriel Ingram as a part-time weekend youth organizer. Two more community organizers are being hired from 130 people who applied for the jobs. Portland is one of just four cities to receive Stryve funding. The Centers for Disease Control created the STRYVE program to tackle youth violence from a public health perspective. Violence is a health problem because violence is the leading cause of death for young African American men.

Joe McFerrin, president and CEO of Portland Opportunities and Industrialization Center explained POIC's four programs that work with youth and families. The high school program helps disadvantaged and gang-affected students stay in school and graduate. It works with youth until age 25. The Civic Justice Corps program works with young people with a juvenile justice history, helping them get GED's or diplomas as well as work skills. The Summer Works program offers paid work to 90 students every summer. And a new Community Healing Initiative will offer intensive wraparound support to 60 high-risk youth and their families. The Latino Network is offering a similar program.



Roberta Phillips and Rebecca Stavenjord

ored 11:45 with the Community Impact award at its 3rd annual Evening of Impact Jan. 26.

"This has surpassed buzz and it has become interest," said Chabre Vickers, director of community relations and diversity programs for the mentoring nonprofit at the 11:45 meeting. "It's become emails and calls. People are asking me, 'How are you doing this? In the least-churched state?'"

11:45 has also been recognized with the city's Spirit of Portland Award.

Among 11:45's recent achievements: Mobilizing volunteers to provide a caring presence in Holladay Park every Friday evening.

The 11:45 leadership team is: Pastor George Merriweather of Northeast Community Fellowship Church, Bishop C.T. Wells of Emmanuel Temple, Bishop Steven Holt of The International Fellowship Family, Dr. W.G Hardy Jr. of Highland United Church of Christ, Bishop Marcus Pollard of Emmanuel Church of God In Christ United, and Dr. Mark Strong of Life Change Christian Center.

Volunteers commit to serve in one of four areas: There, Share, Care and Prayer. 'There' volunteers form a visible presence in streets and parks. 'Connected' organized by



Pastor George Merriweather

John Canda, Robert Richardson, Sam Sachs and others has taken the lead on that effort.

Share volunteers have become mentors, many working with Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Columbia NW. More than 300 people already have stepped forward to share.

Care volunteers are building a directory of resources available through each church and in the community. They also are reaching out to grieving families with practical help and supportive listening. Other items on the care agenda: crisis support and prison visiting.

Prayer volunteers commit to supporting the efforts through active prayer.

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