

The Det News/Free Press Sat July 4, 92

Southwest siders not sure gang crackdown will help

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Show us.

That's the attitude of people in southwest Detroit to this week's federal crackdown on the violent gangs that peddle drugs and guns on their streets. Residents and business owners cheered the arrests but were skeptical of any lasting impact.

"Who knows?" said Charles Danto, owner of Danto Furniture on West Vernor. "Six months from now, we'll know."

One of Danto's salesmen, Jim Perchä, said: "You know what's going to happen? They're going to bring in new leaders."

Mary Oakley, working behind the counter at a convenience store on West Vernor, said "I'm hoping it will" make a difference, "but I doubt it, because there's so many of them. I'm glad someone's going to at least try something."

Oakley said her teenage son had been harassed by gang members, and that gunplay frequently disrupted her neighborhood near Patton Park.

Agents of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms began arresting suspected street gang members and their associates Sunday and Monday, capping an eight-month investigation that produced federal gun and drug trafficking charges against more than 55 people. About 40 are in custody.

Most are reputed members of the Latin Counts, the area's most notorious gang. Police said the Counts control much of the crack and powder cocaine trafficking in the area.

Gary Garmo, owner of La Plaza Market across from Clark Park, said city government has been more of a problem than gangs for the southwest side, which has been fighting to remain commercially viable.

"The area is not what it used to be," Garmo said. "But I don't know if it has much to do with gangs. You'd have to ask Coleman Young about that."

He cited high taxes and poor city services, including cutbacks in recreation programs at Clark Park.

Several of the more than a dozen people interviewed declined to give their names.

"If I wasn't afraid, I'd say, 'Go ahead,'" said one homeowner in the Springwells-Vernor area. Others reported having been threatened by gang members after calling police.

Several residents said they no longer call 911, which automatically supplies their address to police.

Residents agreed with federal authorities that gang activity has worsened during the past two years.

And one skeptical homeowner predicted the gang members would be released back to the neighborhood soon.

"I hope I eat those words, but I don't think I will," she said.

CRIMEN JUVENIL

...VOLANTE ... PARA EL COMANDO ... PRESENCIA DE GANGAS