

Shootings by gangs worry neighbors

BY WILLIAM KLEINKNECHT
Free Press Staff Writer

Nearly three dozen members of the Latin Counts gang are expected to be sentenced to prison terms in coming weeks, but southwest Detroit continues to struggle with a growing number of street gangs, law enforcement officials say.

The indictment of 43 Latin Counts last June left the gang without stable leadership, since most of the defendants have been jailed while on trial or awaiting sentencing, the officials say.

But other gangs are still battling for control of neighborhood turf, causing an escalation of the drive-by shootings that are of the most concern to police and neighborhood residents.

"The gang problem has not gone away," said Inez DeJesus, a member of the Council Against Gang-Related Violence. "There are still shootings. Kids are still being intimidated and harassed on their way to school."

Police investigators have identified some 50 gangs in Detroit and neighboring Downriver with more than 800 members. Not all are made up of hardcore criminals, but many of them are becoming bolder and more dangerous, say police and community leaders.

The gang most worrisome to authorities is the Cash Flow Posse, an ally of the Latin Counts comprising Hispanic, white and black youths. The Cash Flow is said to be engaged in a turf battle with another gang, the Detroit Kings.

One of the Cash Flow members, Gregory Ballester, 18, was shot and wounded Dec. 30 on Green Street in a drive-by shooting that police believe was carried out by the Detroit Kings.

"The Counts are laying real low," said one law enforcement official who asked not to be identified. "But it's heating up between these two gangs. They've already had a few drive-bys."

Inspector Benny Napoleon, commander of the Police Department's special crimes section, said none of southwest Detroit's gangs has been as organized or sophisticated as some of the city's more infamous drug gangs, like Young Boys Inc. and the Chambers Brothers. The gangs' battles are more over turf than profits, he said.

But investigators say some have acted as distribution arms for sophisticated Cuban drug organizations and that one gang, the X-men, has become more deeply involved in narcotics than the others.

An escalation of the neighborhood's gang problem is just what police and community leaders have been working to avoid for nearly four years.

Southwest Detroit has had gangs since the 1950s, but most were small and relatively harmless. The problem took a turn for the worse in 1989, when several members of the Latin Counts gang in Chicago moved to the area and began recruiting members.

The Spanish Cobra Nation, a rival Chicago gang, followed the Counts to Detroit a few months later. Each of the gangs since has recruited more than 100 members, sparking gang warfare in a number of neighborhoods. Among the people slain in gang disputes were

CALL FOR HELP

Among the phone numbers people can call if they are exposed to threats or recruitment by gangs are:

- Detroit Police Department anti-gang hot line — 224-GANG.
- La Sed (community organization) — 554-2025.
- Latino Family Services — 841-7380.
- Council Against Gang-Related Violence (Holy Redeemer Church) — 842-3450.
- U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (firearms violations) — 1-800-ATF-GUNS.

three of the Counts' original leaders.

The community has not sat still. A number of community agencies are working to deter gang recruitment and to discourage gang members from resorting to violence. One agency, Latino Family Services, is considered neutral ground for gangs to meet and discuss conflicts.

Officials of Latino Family Services and another organization, La Sed, declined to be interviewed about the gang problem. Inez said her group is considering establishing neighborhood patrols to make sure youths are not bothered as they walk to school.

Police have also moved aggressively against the gangs. The Detroit Police Department's gang squad has a gang-violence hot line and has staged a number of highly publicized sweeps in which large numbers of people were arrested.

The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms swept through southwest Detroit over two days last June and arrested 43 Counts, including several leaders. Thirty-four of the gang members since have been convicted or pleaded guilty and are headed for prison terms ranging from two to seven years.

The Cobras have also run into troubles in Detroit. Police say the gang has been driven out of the city by other gangs and is operating in several Downriver communities.

Following the Chicago model, all the gangs are divided into three broad groups: people, folks and family. Both the Counts and the Posse are people, and thus often allied in warfare against gangs that are folks, such as the Cobras.

Each gang has its own symbols and hand-signs, and gang graffiti is as prominent on southwest Detroit signs as liquor advertisements. Two common items of graffiti are the upturned pitchfork (folks) and the downturned pitchfork (people).

"We've made a lot of progress against the gangs," Napoleon said. "That's one reason we are seeing such an explosion of gang activity Downriver. But there is still a lot more to do."

Stray deer rounded up from Selfridge air base

BY AMBER ARELLANO
Free Press Staff Writer

The sight of deer being herded onto waiting trucks at Selfridge Air National Guard base Sunday disgusted some neighbors of the base outside Mt. Clemens.

But officials called the deer a hazard to the airfields after three were struck and killed by speeding aircraft in the past year.

By Sunday, 43 had been rounded up and sent packing — the does and fawns sent to a state game preserve near Port Huron, the bucks sold to a state-licensed breeder for \$250 each.

The sight of 10 trucks and a helicopter herding deer seemed cruel and inappropriate to some.

"The technique they're using bothered me; they should tranquilize them instead," said Joanne Wehr, of Mt.

Clemens, who witnessed the chase from her home Sunday.

"These deer are so used to people looking at them that they're not scared of them."

Last month a plane landing at 130 m.p.h. hit and killed two deer standing on a runway. In March, another deer was killed by an F18 plane, said base spokesman Lou Nigro.

Nigro said Sunday's "deer trap-out," the third in a month-long effort to banish the deer, was approved by the state Department of Natural Resources and the safest way for deer to be herded. Tranquilizers can lead to an accidental overdose, he said.

The deer are driven like cattle into nets and loaded onto trucks.

Nigro said Sunday's round-up probably would be the last until fall, when deer sightings usually increase on the base.

Critics say project would disturb park

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"A water park is certainly not compatible, in my view, with the park's natural environment or the township's master plan," said Nancy Strole, Springfield's clerk. "Metroparks hasn't even briefed us on what they're going to do."

And an amusement-like water park in less populated areas entices people to settle, said Johnson. "Parks should be where people are already, rather than drawing people out there, with their cars and pollution and noise."

Metroparks needs approval from both townships before breaking ground. Engineers are researching how the water park — which would

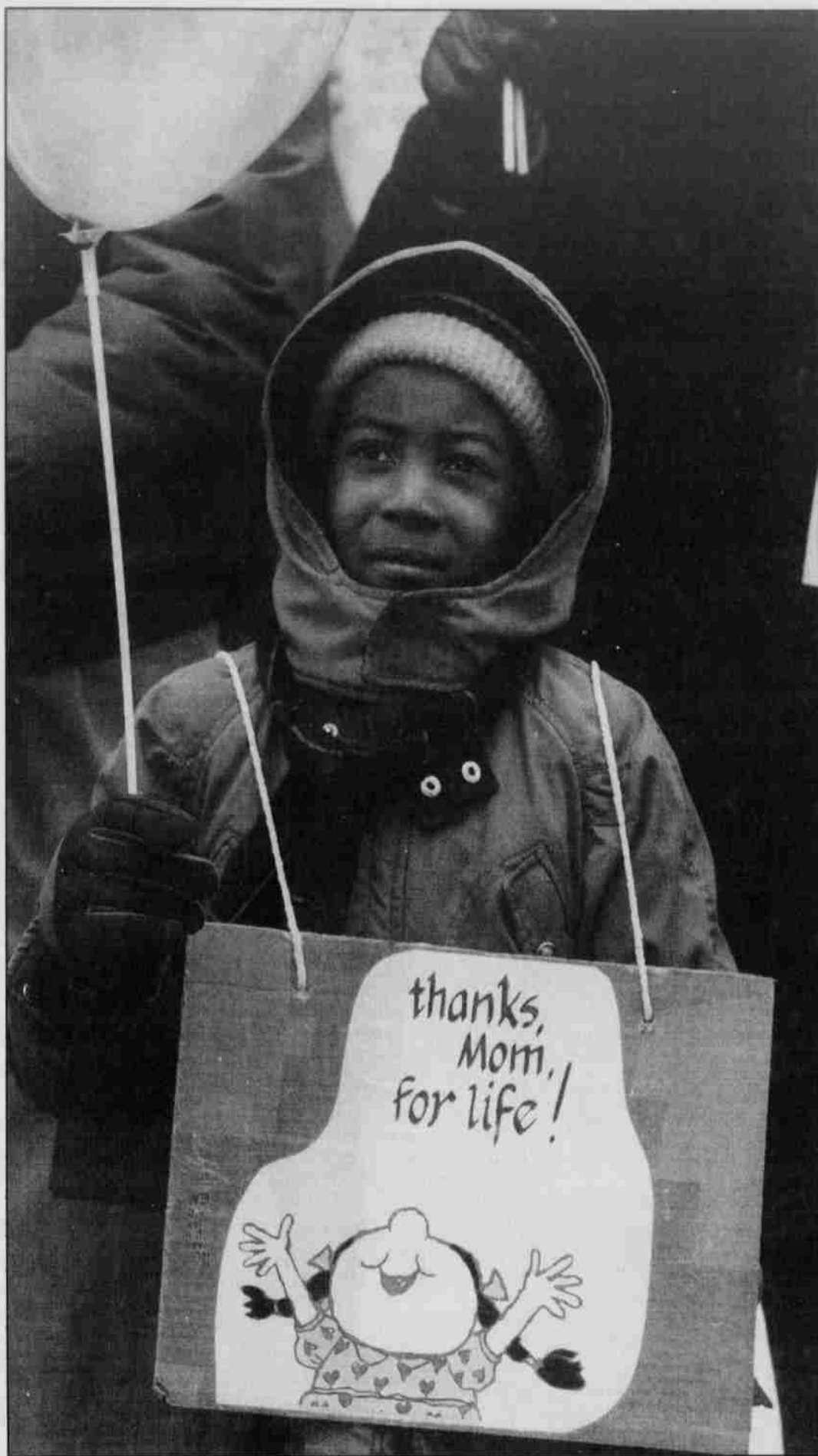
take five years to build — would get its water, said Metroparks Chief Planner Dan Duncan.

Duncan said a 500-foot vegetation buffer zone, possibly 1,000 feet in some areas, will be between area residences and the water park.

The proposal also worries Oakland County Parks officials, who run the Waterford Oaks wave pool.

Molanen said Metroparks is seeking control of the Pontiac Lake State Recreation Area and would drop the water park idea if successful. But such an arrangement is not even close to being negotiated, said Hank zurBurg, Department of Natural Resources parks division chief.

REMEMBERING ROE VS. WADE



Jason Sweeney, 8, of Detroit attends a rally of abortion opponents Sunday in downtown Detroit. Hundreds gathered to mark the upcoming 20th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade, which affirmed abortion rights.

Abortion opponents rally to recall landmark ruling

BY KAREN JACOBS
Free Press Staff Writer

Chanting "Choose life, not death," hundreds of abortion foes assembled in Detroit on Sunday to mark the 20th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade, the landmark Supreme Court case that affirmed a woman's right to abortion.

"There's been between 29 and 30 million people killed in the last 20 years, and we want to remember them," said Ann Thomas, president of Right to Life-Lifespan of Metro Detroit, a sponsor of the rally held at Kennedy Square downtown.

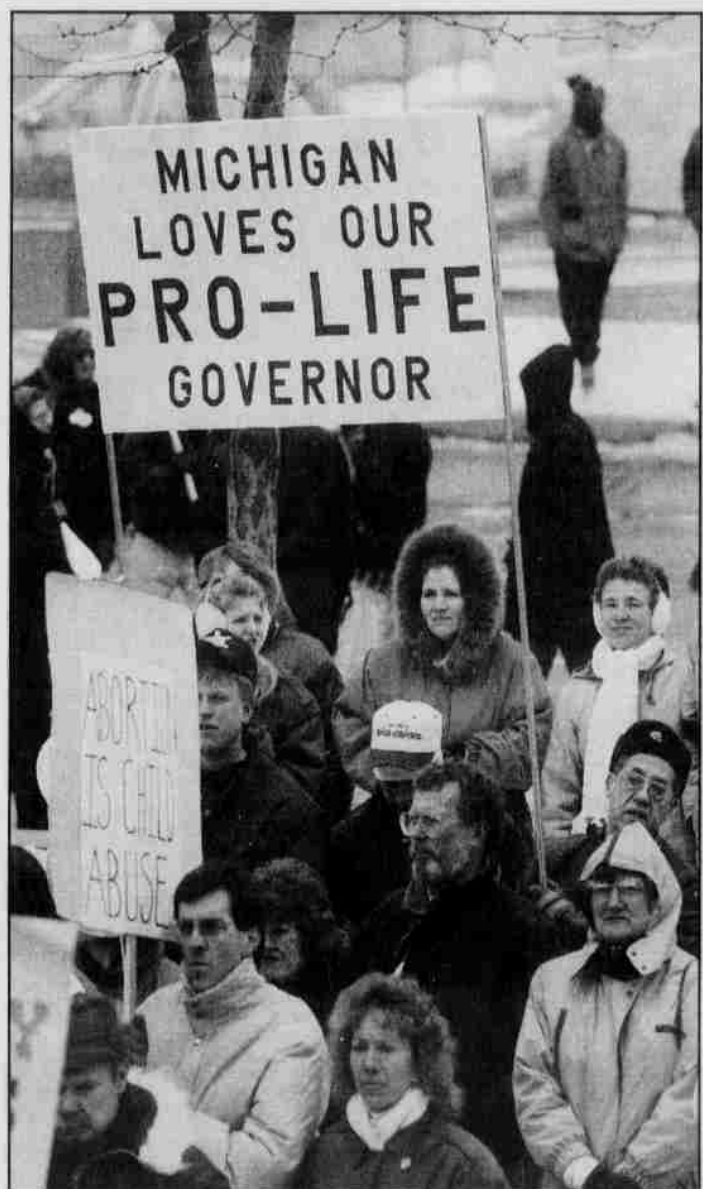
About 25 abortion rights advocates staged a counter-rally. Representing the National Women's Rights Organizing Coalition, they carried signs and chanted phrases such as "Right to Life, Your name's a lie, you don't care if we live or die." Police reported no confrontations.

The high court ruling, handed down Jan. 22, 1973, involved the case of Norma McCorvey, a single, pregnant woman who sued to challenge Texas law that prohibited abortion unless the woman's life was in danger because of her pregnancy. The Supreme Court held that states could not ban abortions in the first trimester.

Right to Life-Lifespan members vowed Sunday to look toward the Supreme Court and White House "and demand that protection be restored to women and children," but admitted that the election of a majority Democratic Congress and President-elect Bill Clinton, who is an abortion rights advocate, are setbacks.

"We'll continue to work at the local and state levels," said Al Lemmo, a member of the Wayne County West chapter of Lifespan.

Judy Ellsworth of Post Abortion Counseling and Education, drew on experience to talk about abortion:



Demonstrators show support for Gov. John Engler, an abortion opponent who supports parental consent and other restrictions.

She had one at age 18. She said it took many years to deal with the emotional trauma she suffered, and said other women must deal with it as well.

"An alcoholic can stop drinking and change and say 'I'm sorry' to his family," she said, "but we can't bring

back children we've killed." Speakers included state Sen. Doug Carl, R-Utica; Rep. Nick Ciaramitaro, D-Roseville; Paul Moses of Central Macomb Right to Life, and the Rev. J.D. Landis of Community United Methodist Church in Romulus.

Grave robbery draws outrage

Prosecutor seeks tougher sentences

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later convicted of child cruelty. During the investigation of the grave digging, she told police a boyfriend beat Rebecca to death.

Eighteen years later, Rebecca was violated again.

On the afternoon of May 21, 1990, Maryann Thompson was strolling through Lakeville Cemetery, which is tucked into a stunning hilltop setting in rural Addison Township.

Thompson, the administrator of the township's cemeteries, was selling a burial plot to a young couple.

As Thompson walked past plot 66, she recalls thinking that the ground near the grave looked askew.

"It looked like a dog had done a little bit of digging," she said. "There was some gauze on the ground, which looked decayed, and there were satin ribbons about 15 feet away."

Thompson notified the cemetery's caretaker, who called the Oakland County Sheriff's Department.

When Deputy Holly Hadac arrived, she remembered that the grave had been tampered with before.

The next day, the sheriff's office obtained a court order to exhume the grave. They discovered that Rebecca's remains had been stolen.

Suspicious quickly turned toward the dead girl's mother, who now lives in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and goes by the last name of Turk.

When investigators reached Victoria Turk in 1990, she denied any part in the disappearance of her daughter's remains. She said she had last been to the cemetery a month earlier and had placed plastic flowers on the grave.

The case bogged down until Oct. 3, 1990, when investigators learned that a teenager sitting in the Oakland County Jail on a probation violation might have some information.

Paul Light confessed and named the others. That same day, Ward and Staley also confessed. They seemed relieved. "If you hadn't contacted me today, I would have called you," Staley told officers.

They told detectives their story: On the day before the grave tampering was discovered, the four friends gathered in Ward's Oxford apartment and started drinking whiskey and beer.

"We all got pretty drunk," Staley recalled. As day turned to night, the friends talked about forming a gang to protect themselves from "outsiders."

Ward said he thought up the name because he was on probation at the time for aggravated assault.

The club would need two symbols, they decided: a tattoo and a skull. They would collect the skull first. "I know where we can get one," Jeffrey Brecht volunteered.

At about 1 a.m., the four jumped in Brecht's Chevrolet Caprice and headed to Lakeville Cemetery. Brecht's grandfather, Fred Brecht, lived across the street. The group sneaked into his storage shed and removed two shovels, a tire iron and a blanket.

Brecht led his friends to the grave site and they quickly removed the tiny white coffin. Ward cracked open the coffin with the tire iron and placed the remains in the blanket.

The friends told investigators that after they drove off with the remains in the trunk of Brecht's car, they panicked when they passed a police cruiser. They drove to a nearby gravel pit and threw the remains in, with rocks in a plastic bag.

When Brecht later confessed, he told investigators that he had dug up his cousin's grave himself, months before the body-snatching. He said he was drunk.

"The kid himself is a good kid," his grandfather, Fred Brecht, said last week. "Maybe they all went off the deep end."

Judge Francis X. O'Brien sentenced Brecht last May to two years' probation and ordered mental health counseling. Light and Staley received suspended sentences. They must all share the \$1,995 cost of reburial of Rebecca.

Brecht and Staley declined to be interviewed. Ward is in jail and could not be reached for comment. Light also could not be reached.

Victoria Turk also could not be reached. After Rebecca's body was recovered, Turk took the remains — and the headstone — back with her to northern Michigan.

She has told no one where her little girl is buried.