

Gangs plague southwest Detroit

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close to the window because of drive-by shootings," said Johnny Vega, 33. "We can't let them play outside. We can't go to the store at night."

Activists and police say violent, organized gangs gained a foothold in southwest Detroit in the late 1980s when two Chicago-based gangs began recruiting members there.

One of the affected neighborhoods is the Southwest Detroit Improvement Association, a nearly two-square-mile area bordered by Livernois, Woodmere, John Kronk and Fort.

Gangs in other parts of the city generally focus on selling drugs and guns, but profits aren't as much of a priority for gangs in southwest Detroit, said John Rutecki, a counselor for Teens Reaching Out, a youth support group at the Clark YMCA.

Gangs in southwest Detroit "are more of an answer to displacement by the downturn of economic conditions and the lack of social services" and recreation facilities in the area, said Rutecki, who also is assistant principal at Wilson Middle School. News media coverage of gang incidents also makes other youths resort to violence to gain more attention, Rutecki added.

He also said that violence in general — not necessarily from gangs — is higher in the area, primarily because of the drug trade. "With the economy down, that's one of the only ways for people to support themselves."

Southwest Detroit was home to three major auto plants that closed in the late 1980s, taking with them 8,600 jobs — many of them from residents of the immediate area.

Angie Reyes, supervisor of youth services at Latino Family Services, said the jobless rate in southwest Detroit is now about 35 percent, and the community has gone from one that was predominantly working class to one that predominantly collects public assistance.

Reyes said some estimates of the dropout rate for youths in southwest Detroit approach 86 percent with many pupils never making it out of middle school. Detroit Public Schools estimate that on average 60 percent of pupils entering city high schools graduate.

Consequently, too many young people in southwest Detroit have too much idle time.

One 16-year-old seemed incredulous when asked if he would ever quit being a gang member.

"It would be like leaving my family," said the teen, who would only give his street name. The eighth grader at Boynton Middle School wore a blue and black Fila jacket, popular with gang members in the Pitt and Green neighborhood.

Alarmed by the influx of organized, structured gangs in the late '80s, activists have worked steadily to try to reduce gang violence and offer youths positive alternatives to gangs.

The actions taken by both the city and the community include:

- Formation two years ago of the Council Against Gang-Related Violence. With a mailing list of 600 people, it brought together residents, churches and businesses to address the gang issue. The council will stage a conference March 19 to bring youths and adults together to work on communication, said Pat Thompson, the council's project coordinator.
- A plan by Detroit Police to beef up staffing of the gang squad to at least the 1991 level of 150. The squad, was cut by about 50 percent during a police reorganization. The extra officers would help police monitor and arrest violent offenders.

Last month, police added three Hispanic officers each to the 4th (Fort-Green) Precinct and the gang squad from its latest graduating classes. There currently are 68 Hispanic officers on the 3,848-member force. Residents have urged the department to add more Hispanic officers in the large Hispanic 3rd (Vernor) and 4th precincts. Chief Isaiah (Ike) McKinnon also has offered officers in the precincts a chance to learn conversational Spanish.

New cooperation with federal agencies also should help, said Deputy Chief

GANG VIOLENCE PERSISTS

The Southwest Detroit Improvement Association neighborhood is far from the city's worst. Many areas are poorer and have higher unemployment. Gang-related violence is a problem, however.



Source: Patricia Becker, APB Associates, Inc.

Detroit Free Press

■ 1990 population: 21,553

■ Housing units: 8,457

■ Race/ethnicity: 68 percent non-Hispanic white; 3 percent non-Hispanic black; 28 percent Hispanic, up from 19 percent in 1980; 1 percent other.

■ Unemployment: 13 percent in 1990

■ Income/poverty: Median household income was \$14,950 in 1990. Thirty-four percent of population lives in poverty. Thirty-eight percent of households have no earned income. Thirty percent reported income from Social Security and 30 percent from public assistance.

HELPING KIDS FIGHT

Here's how experts say parents can help fight gangs:

BE INVOLVED. The most important thing a parent can do is to remain involved in a child's life. Participate in activities such as going to the movies, shopping, skating or playing at the park. Don't just drop off children at these places. That sends them the message that you're not interested in what they're doing. Your children's sense of belonging begins in the family. A gang will make it a priority to be with your children and know what they are doing.

HAVE RULES. Make clear, consistent consequences so your child will have a secure sense of boundaries. Kids really do want rules. In a gang, there are rules and clear, drastic consequences for breaking them, such as beatings. Gangs dictate to members what they wear, who they associate with and what they do.

KEEP IN TOUCH. Get acquainted with your children's friends by inviting them to your home or on a family outing. This will help you assess your children's self-esteem and their skill in building friendships. Gangs make it their business to

know your children's friends. Gangs say they offer friendship and loyalty, but it is conditional on following the gang's terms.

GIVE CHILDREN VARIETY. Expose them to as many healthy experiences as possible so they'll discover things to excite them and keep them active. Teens, especially, have a need for excitement. They need to experience the thrill of playing sports, writing articles for the school newspaper, leading a school club or trying out for a part in a play. A parent can help by guiding and supporting children as they learn, grow and develop confidence in themselves. For gangs, excitement may come in the form of fights with rival gangs, beating new members as an initiation, using or selling drugs or marking territory by spray-painting graffiti on the property of others. Such excitement can result in your child paying the consequences in court.

It takes an ongoing commitment from parents to stay involved, in touch and in control throughout a child's life. When the family meets a child's needs, the gang has nothing to offer.

Source: Family Service of Detroit and Wayne County

WHOM TO CALL FOR HELP

If you or someone you know is exposed to threats or recruitment by gangs, call:

- Detroit Police Department anti-gang hotline: 224-GANG, anytime.
- LA SED: 554-2025, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday; youth center, 841-1430, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday.
- Latino Family Services: 841-7380, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

■ Council Against Gang-Related Violence: 358-9888 (leave a message).

■ U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (gun violations): 1-800-ATF-GUNS, anytime.

■ Southwest Youth Assistance Program at Clark Park YMCA, 841-1023, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday. Sponsors "Teens Reaching Out," a youth support group.

Benny Napoleon, former head of the gang squad. That cooperation was discouraged under the previous administration.

But community leaders said they look to the Archer administration to help them fund more programs for young people, more recreational facilities and more jobs.

"We need more community-based programs and after-school programs for youth to use some of that energy," said Ines DeJesus, who chairs the council on anti-gang violence.

The Patton Park recreation center is the only city-owned center within the Southwest Detroit Improvement Association boundaries. Latin Americans for Social and Economic Development Inc. sponsors youth activities, but it is closed nights.

Jimmy Roberts, Detroit's recrea-

tion superintendent, said his department is reviewing its structure to see whether it can expand hours. For instance, the Patton Park center has been open on Saturdays since October.

Also, six schools in the association boundaries take part in the city's leisure education program, in which parents and students meet from 3-6 p.m. to hold rap sessions and play sports. The program is designed for youths age 13 and under.

Reyes of Latino Family Services said the administration must help in keeping the pressure on gang violence and making young people see something to live for.

"We have a view of young people in gangs as hard-core criminals that are unsalvageable," she said. "But a lot are ordinary kids who haven't been given alternatives."

Archer asks council to trim 19 percent

BY DAN HOLLY
Free Press Staff Writer

The Detroit City Council and the Dennis Archer administration are having their first serious disagreement, and it involves an issue that has troubled many relationships — money.

The administration wants the council to cut the \$6.8-million-a-year operating costs of five council-controlled agencies by a whopping 19 percent. Council members, however, have balked at approving the \$1.3-million cut until they see how deeply the mayor plans to chop his executive departments.

On Monday, Councilman Mel Ravitz recommended withholding action on the proposed council cuts until after Archer submits his budget in April. The council probably will agree to cuts then, he and other members said.

"Then, we'll be in a position to know how much we want to cut with-

out destroying our ability to be the balance of power," Ravitz said.

Legislative agencies include the City Planning Commission, the auditor general, the council's research and analysis division, the council's legal staff and the City Clerk's Office.

Mike Sarafa, the mayor's liaison to the council, said council members' concerns about maintaining the balance of power are a "smoke screen" for their distaste for cutting their own budget.

The administration wants council members to find most of the cuts themselves. "There's a large deficit and what are we going to do about it?" Sarafa said of the estimated \$88.5-million shortfall. He said the mayor will propose the same "substantial and realistic cuts" for executive agencies as for legislative agencies.

Although the council members seemed to agree Monday that they would forgo new cars this year — it

buys them every two years — Sarafa said that "simply eliminating cars leaves a lot to be desired."

The budget dispute is reminiscent of stormy council-mayor relations of the Coleman Young era. In his last budget message to the council in 1993, Young accused members of trying to "exempt yourself from the sacrifice being asked of everyone else."

Does the budget conflict mean the council's honeymoon with Archer is over?

Said Sarafa: "Tension between the legislative and executive branches of government is healthy."

Said Ravitz: "I don't expect that we'll be disagreeable, but I do expect we'll disagree — starting now."

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