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June 14, 2010

GANG-RELATED CRIMES DROPPING IN RALEIGH

Criminal activity involving gangs was down by 49 percent in Raleigh during 2009, according to a report by the Gang Unit of the City of Raleigh Police Department. Police attributed the decrease to collaborations with community organizations, proactive intervention measures, gang prevention and suppression, and aggressive enforcement.

There were a total of 1,417 gang-related crimes in the Capital City last year. Not only did overall gang-affiliated criminal incidents drop, decreases in gang activity were also reported in specific crime categories citywide in 2009, according to the Police Department's report. The report found that:

- Gang-related drug cases were down 43 percent;
- Firearm cases involving gang members dropped by 53 percent;
- Assaults involving gangs decreased by 67 percent; and,
- Gang-related robberies were down by 56 percent.

In 2009, the Police Department began tracking and analyzing gang-related crimes. Robberies, assaults, burglaries, vandalisms and illegal drugs are the leading crimes generally committed by gangs. Fifty-six (56) percent of Raleigh's gang crime occurred in the southeast sector but no area of the city was immune from these acts.

The Police Department estimates there are 56 separate gangs or gang sets in Raleigh, with total membership estimated at 3,070. About 76 percent of these gang members are between 16 and 25 years old, according to the Police Department's report on gang activity in 2009. Half of all gang members are in the 18-to-22 age range, the report said.

In recent years, the City of Raleigh Police Department has initiated several gang prevention, intervention and suppression initiatives. The goal of these programs is to minimize the presence, activities and violence of gangs, and to promptly identify and arrest those gang members who commit crimes. The Police Department focuses on educating parents, teachers and others in the community on how to recognize and prevent gang activity. Here are some of the department's anti-gang initiatives:

- The Police Department provides all of its officers with training regarding gangs, including mandatory in-service training. Among those who receive this training are district gang liaisons, school resource officers, D.A.R.E. officers, community policing officers and crime prevention specialists;
- The Police Department's Gang Suppression Unit, formed in 2006, uses targeted enforcement strategies to address gang-related criminal activity. The department's Gang Intelligence Unit, which was started in 2008, monitors criminal activity of gangs and gathers intelligence information on gang-related crime patterns. This intelligence information helps the police develop strategies for combating gangs;
- The Police Department's school resource officers assigned to Raleigh high schools work closely with security personnel from the Wake County Public School System on gangs, as well as other potential threats to students;
- The Police Department is one of 60 partners in the Wake County Gang Prevention Partnership. The partnership works to reduce violence, illegal activities and gang membership throughout the county;
- The Police Department operates a mentor initiative in which retired police officers work as part-time mentors to at-risk children at the Sgt. Courtney T. Johnson, Tarboro Road and Roberts Park community centers in southeast Raleigh. Additionally, the Police Department has partnered with Second Round Boxing, a non-profit organization that also works with at-risk children while teaching life skills through boxing. Officers with the department's Gang Suppression Unit and the Selective Enforcement Unit help train the youth with such things as physical conditioning and boxing techniques. The hope is that these officers develop positive relationships with these youth, which in turn could lead to mentorships;
- The Police Department promotes a Gang Tip Line, 996-GANG (4264) that citizens can use to request information about gang awareness presentations and to report possible gang activity; and,
- The Police Department partners with the City's Community Services and Parks and Recreation departments and others to offer summer youth programs to keep children off the streets, out of trouble and away from gangs. These programs include a charm school for girls between the ages of 13 and 17, the Explorer Police Academy; job skills training, the Junior Police Academy, a soccer camp, the Student Police Academy, and a Mentorship Baseball League.

In addition to these initiatives, the Police Department is planning additional anti-gang strategies as part of a five-year strategic plan. These include:

- Creating a Youth & Family Services Section in the Detective Division. This new section will be comprised of the department's Family Violence Intervention Unit and a Juvenile Crimes Unit along with Youth Services and D.A.R.E. officers. The consolidation will bolster the Police Department's efforts to combat family violence and youth offenders, including gang members;
- Expanding youth intervention programs to reduce gang activity; and,
- Creating a third Selective Enforcement Unit and a third Street Drug Unit to complement ongoing initiatives in areas of the city that have been identified as having high numbers of gang members.