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THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 2012

NEWS Police Hope Prosecutions and Puppet Camp Will Help Solve Portland's Gang Problems

POSTED BY NATHAN GILLES ON THU, JUN 14, 2012 AT 1:22 PM



We've got one week until it's officially summer and that means we're due for swimming, sunburns, and a predictable rise in gang violence. Yup, with schools out and opportunities for summer employment rough in this shitty economy, police noted at a press conference this morning in Holladay Park that teens having time on their hands tends to increase gang violence.

To solve this whole **idle-hands-are-the-devil's-playground** problem, the city has ramped up its efforts to keep Portland's youth occupied during the summer months. This morning, Mayor Sam Adams announced **Operation Safe Summer**: a program mixing prevention and enforcement to keep Portland's kids engaged in "structured settings" and, when necessary, prosecute gang members to fullest extent possible. As Adams put it,



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"Operation Safe Summer is about intervention. If intervention doesn't work, it's about enforcement and tough prosecution."

So imagine if you will, a more enticing carrot and a heavier stick.

The carrot in this case is more programs for teens, more things to do in the parks during the summer months (Bike camp! Puppet camp! "The art of poetry!") and **daily meals** for kids that usually rely on school lunch.

As for the stick, as mentioned, it's in large part about tougher prosecution. To this end, the city is working closely with US Attorney Amanda Marshall, who has increased the number of attorneys in her office who focus on gang issues from one to four. Though she added, "We can't arrest ourselves out of the problem." The Portland Police Bureau also plans on taking officers off other duties and placing them on Operation Safe Summer in kind of an anti-gang full court press. Police Chief Mike Reese said the effort would be difficult given the current lean budget: "Sometimes it's a little like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic."

The third element in all this is the community side. The city chose Holladay Park as this morning's press conference site to draw attention to one neighborhood group called Connected. Started by neighborhood leader **John Canda** in November of last year, Connected is a group of adults that walk around Holladay Park on Friday nights talking to the kids who hang out there. All this talking seems to have had a positive effect. According to Chief Reese, crime in the park has dropped since Connected began. "We would like to see this in every park in Portland," says Canda.

As for gang violence in the city itself, according to police stats, so far this year we have had 57 shootings. That's not great, it's up from 36 shootings at this time last year. To put this in perspective, this is still nowhere near the number of shootings that happen in the mid-90s, where Portland reached a high of over 300 shootings in 1994. So, at least as far as the last few years are concerned gang violence is on the rise, but it could be a lot worse. The big difference between then and now, says Reese, is that gang activity has now more evenly spread across the city.

And here's a picture of the graph the police used.



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Yeah because we all know that puppet camps are the #1 deterrent for violent gang crime. Whatever you do, don't blame the parents. That's like....o....m...g... so racist.

Posted by thebadsteed on June 14, 2012 at 1:39 PM · Report



I told them a hundred times: put Spinal Tap first and puppet camp last!

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