

Increases in patrols, support readied for summer

Police director, mayor outline two-pronged approach

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

Two weeks ago, during the Summit on Violence at St. Matthew AME Church, city officials discussed how they planned to increase public safety as the summer approached.

"The summer is upon us, and I know we can't support some things the way we have in the past, but I believe the young people in our community deserve more and better than what they have been getting. The responsibility is ours," said Gloria Boseman, a member of East Orange General Hospital's board of directors. "We need solutions now. Our young people need a job, recreation and some kind of plan for the future."

Boseman said she wanted to know how officials planned to ensure "our" cities were safe.

"We have a two-pronged approach that includes police and law enforcement and recreation," said Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. "I have always believed that idle hands are the devil's playground, so I and the City Council have made recreation programs a priority. We have to be creative in that regard, and help support that program, because there are a variety of pre-trouble things we can do to intervene and prevent kids from going the wrong way."

Hawkins said in addition to taking steps to prevent Orange youth from getting into trouble by investing in activities and recreation programs, his administration planned more law enforcement action. Police Director John Rappaport said the department has increased patrols and manpower in the city's parks, playgrounds and other areas where young people congregate.

Rappaport said Hawkins was correct to stress the importance of organized recreational activities and social opportunities as a positive alternative in which the city's youth can become involved. That's why, he said, the department has partnered with local groups and churches to make the "two-pronged approach" become reality.

"We have a lot of people who talk the dream, but

don't walk the walk. I'll lock 'em up, you clean 'em up," Rappaport said. "We tried to give each person in the violence summit a package of information reflecting what we have done over the last few years in Orange. Two weeks ago I stood up at a City Council meeting and said it's very difficult to tell people what we had because of ongoing cases, but we have a motto at the Police Department: 'This is your city, this is my city.'"

Reggie Miller, head of the Male Student Support Program within the Orange public schools, said while he agreed with Hawkins and Rappaport, engaging young people and getting them to do things that obviously are in their best interests is not easily accomplished.

"I think I was thrown into the position of being an activist. I think the idea behind the violence summit was nice, but we're missing a lot of the same people that we're talking about helping," said Miller. "We are not the ones out there on the playgrounds in the community. Until we reach out to them, bring them in and get them engaged and involved in what we're trying to do to stop the violence and make the streets safer for them and us, we're not going to be successful."

Several of the young people who attended the summit seemed to agree with the trio. "Hassan," an Orange High School student, said the best way to describe many of his peers' outlook on life that affects their behavior and leads them into trouble is "desperation."

"They're trying to do anything they can to get money," he said. "It's hard for youth to get past that. There's also a lot of sex going on and that's a problem, too."

Sasha Matthews, 25, said she believed Hassan had a point, but young people's desperation was about more than just money.

"You have to understand who you are and what you value, then it will stop you from sleeping around," Matthews said. "I went to school and got an associate's degree. It took me a long time to get a job, but once I did I expanded my thinking and realized I can do things for myself."

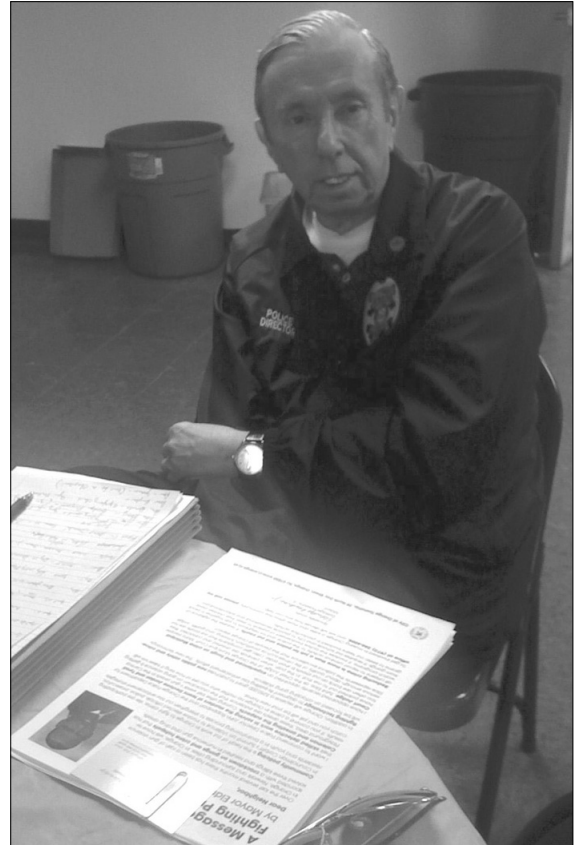


Photo Courtesy Chris Sykes

Police Director John Rappaport discusses the city's summer patrol plans.

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