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State & Local

Page 2

THE BATTALION

Tuesday, March 22, 1994

Community uses education to combat gang

By Melissa Jacobs
The Battalion

Community officials say there are an estimated 35 gangs in Bryan-College Station, and they are working to decrease that number through a series of school-related programs.

Beth Price, coordinator of the Citizens Crime Commission, said one of their main goals is to educate the community and let citizens know there is a gang problem.

"A lot of people are not affected by gangs directly and think it is not a problem," she said. "That's not true, it is a community problem."

In the 1992 Texas Attorney General's Gang Report, Dan Morales said, in the most general terms, a gang is a loosely organized group of three or more individuals. Members perceive themselves as a gang, associate regularly and collaborate in committing delinquency and or criminal offenses.

Price said the Citizens Crime Commission is a vehicle for ordinary citizens to get involved.

"A lot of people want to volunteer but don't know where, so we channel them to the proper agency," she said.

The commission educates through informative meetings held in public schools. They also hold a meeting once a year with a panel of speakers and publish a quarterly newsletter to keep members of the community informed.

Many programs sponsored by the commission deal directly with the gang members.

"We have the Parents Patrol at Lamar High School, we work with the Bryan Special Opportunity School campus in developing a mentor program, and our religious committee meets on a weekly basis with Lamar students who admit they are in a gang," she said.

Ronnie Jackson, chairman of the school committee of the crime commission and a specialist at Bryan's Special Opportunity School agreed there is a gang problem in Bryan-College Station.

"Crimes committed by gangs in this area have been anything from assault to the recent drive-by

shootings to breaking and entering and burglary, he said. "Almost any kind of potential felony has been committed."

Dr. Claude Cunningham, director of secondary programs for the College Station Independent School District, said gangs are affecting the schools.

"The presence of gangs has caused us to change the rules," he said. "We've strengthened the dress code. We have classified certain behavior as gang-related and prohibited that. We have done a lot of training of personnel so they can recognize and forbid dress and hand signs but we haven't had specific problem incidents yet."

One program being used by the Bryan Independent School District is placing students with drop-out potential with disadvantaged people, such as elderly people and kids with handicaps.

"They learn that maybe life isn't quite as bad as they think it is when they see these disadvantaged people," Jackson said.

The College Station Independent School District is using police officers on two campuses. Officer Craig Anderson is assigned to the junior high and Officer Walter Sayers is assigned to the high school. The function of the officers is instructional.

"They provide counseling and teach classes," Cunningham said. "They are both employed by the College Station Police Department and part of their assignment is to work at the schools."

Jackson said research shows several different reasons why young people join gangs.

"The most consistent reason is the need to belong," he said. "A lot of these kids come from dysfunctional families and have little sense of belonging. Gangs give them a sense of belonging and identity. It gives them an immediate connection with a group of friends and members. I think it gives them age-appropriate socialization."

The Bryan Police Department's Gang Intelligence Unit said reasons for joining a gang include; family problems, poor performance in school, sibling affiliation, drug use and protection from other gangs.

Price said gangs are a substitute for a family.

"They give a young person a sense of belonging

and importance," she said. "They substitute most things they should be getting from family."

Jackson said gangs go back as far as human history.

"Even in the early development of this country there was a general association with social and economic levels. There was a lot of ethnic prejudice. Hate groups, usually associated with the Klan and Arian groups, evolved out of ethnic prejudice."

"The community is just part of what is happening in the country," he said. "Gangs are just other facts and they have finally reached Bryan-College Station in the past three to five years, even in communities smaller than ours have gangs."

Price said gang members range in age from sixth grade on up, and the younger ones join to take an older brother or sister.

Cunningham said kids from ages ten to twelve joiners by nature.

"They like to be around people, he said. "At that age have a certain group of friends they are around with and gangs provide a group of friends they are guaranteed to be with. The difference between a running group and a gang is that the gang has hierarchy and is involved in criminal activities."

Price said gangs are categorized into delinquent youth gangs, traditional turf-based gangs, gang-related gangs and hate gangs.

She said there are no hate gangs in Bryan-College Station, which is fortunate.

Price said she feels the programs sponsored by the Citizens Crime Commission have been successful so far.

"I think it's because we're all volunteers who means you don't have to be with any agency or have any special skills or resources," she said. "You care and show up."

Jackson said there is plenty of room for improvement in programs used by the Bryan School District. "Anyone with ideas for gang-reform programs should get in touch with someone at the school district or any of the organizations," he said. "It's difficult to get people with time and energy to devote to the program."

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Houston Oilers owner pursues plans for outdoor stadium

The Associated Press

HOUSTON — Houston Oilers owner Bud Adams, his dreams of a new downtown dome fading, is looking at the great outdoors in his search for a new place to play football.

Amid public opposition to a new dome and news that Houston Rockets owner Leslie Alexander no longer supports the proposal, Adams said Sunday he will look at moving the Oilers to an outdoor stadium.

"We still believe the downtown dome is the best plan to meet Houston's sports facility needs into the 21st century," Adams said.

"However, we will now explore other options that will include the possibility of a 65- to 70,000 seat, open-air football stadium in Houston or one of the rapidly growing adjacent communities."

But the proposal, however preliminary, sparked the same concern Monday as its predecessor — who will pay for it?

"I don't think there would be much of a chance that county taxpayers would be willing to assist in the construction of the stadium," said Galveston County Judge Ray Holbrook. "But the county itself would be glad to help them obtain permits

and do whatever is necessary for them to locate good property."

The Oilers, who play in the Astrodome, and the Houston Rockets, who play at The Summit, were ready to contribute \$75 million toward the \$235 million cost of the proposed downtown dome.

But this weekend, Rockets owner Leslie Alexander said he was pulling out of negotiations for the proposed dome, partly because the public support for it wasn't there.

"At first, I thought it was what the public wanted," Alexander said of the proposed 75,000-seat dome, which would seat 24,000 for basketball.

"But it's become obvious that the

Montgomery County Judge Alan Sadler on Monday welcomed the idea of bringing the Oilers north to the area, but he couldn't pledge a lot of tax dollars to such a project.

"I don't think any of the surrounding counties are big enough to float bond issue of that size," Sadler said, think the risk would be too great.

Sadler said his county may provide some seed money or tax incentives. "But as far as taking the entire financial risk, that probably would happen for Montgomery County or the other surrounding counties," he said.

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