

A safer city: Minneapolis homicides, violent crime plummets in 2009



By Karla Hult



MINNEAPOLIS -- With just one day left of 2009, community leaders are already lauding this year as one of the safest for the city of Minneapolis.

Homicides are down 52 percent from year to year. Violent crimes are down nearly 12 percent. Both numbers prove even more dramatic when compared over a two-year time frame.

"Halleluia," said Sondra Samuels, President of the Peace Foundation, a North Minneapolis-based organization that fights violence in the city.

Samuels says the trend is, at least in part, due to the community, police and city leaders coming together to help fight crime before it happens.

"It being a public health issue, we're after prevention. Not just coming in after a youth, for example, has committed a crime, but preventing it from happening in the first place," Samuels said.

Samuels said in the last six years, her organization has been able to shift its focus: from solely offering vigils for victims to sending a message of hope to the community.

On Wednesday afternoon, a group of workers and volunteers from the Peace Foundation was going door to door in North Minneapolis. They were handing out information and signing people up for the "Northside Achievement Zone." More than 50 organizations contribute to "NAZ," which is a program that encourages children to attend college, through mentoring, after-school and housing programs.

"We need to let them know that high school -- it is an option to graduate from there, but college is the ultimate goal," said Sadia Dickson-Green.

Doris Young was walking alongside Dickson-Green, talking to people about the program. She said it's a way to bring hope to her community and her family, after her own son was shot and killed in 2006.

"It was hard back then. There was so much going on with the killings. People were scared to come outside, scared to come outside after dark," Young said.

The North Minneapolis mother said she now has hope for her neighborhood and for another good year of relatively low crime.

"It's the beginning of the new Northside," she said.

The Minneapolis Police Department and Mayor R.T. Rybak declined to comment on the end of the year numbers Wednesday. City officials plan to hold a press conference on the reports next week.

Meantime, Minneapolis is not the only major city seeing a drop in crime. New York, Los Angeles -- and neighboring St. Paul have all seen a dip in crime.

The St. Paul Police Department confirms a 25 percent drop in homicides from year to year and a nearly eight percent drop in overall violent crime.

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