

Gangs – You Lose!
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One of the most disturbing trends in our region has been an increase in gang-related criminal activities. From annoying graffiti to extreme violence, the evidence of growing numbers of young people in gangs is undeniable. The Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force reports that over the past 12 months there have been 391 arrests related to gangs with 123 of them being felony charges. The Task Force efforts have resulted in semiautomatics, revolvers, and rifles and 46 knives or cutting instruments taken off our streets.

All the jurisdictions in Northern Virginia along with the Virginia State Police actively participate in the regional anti-gang efforts through the Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force. Recently the group along with Congressman Frank Wolf announced an even more intense anti-gang education and prevention campaign called “Gangs – You Lose!”

Continual, intense efforts are needed on both the enforcement and the prevention sides. The General Assembly has in recent years tightened the laws related to gang behavior in order to give the police and prosecutors the tools they need. Cooperation and involvement from the community at large are needed for this effort to be successful. Faith communities along with the business community can make major contributions.

One of the very hopeful programs getting underway to help young people well beyond the concern about gang involvement is the Fairfax County After-School Network started by Dr. Mark Emery, former Chairman of the Fairfax County School Board. Mark, working with Restonian Roth Toxopeus, is busy getting the schools especially at the middle school level to stay open late as a place for young people to be involved in positive activities.

As Mark Emery has noted, the number of children in our communities who are at home without supervision for several hours each day is staggering. At the same time, our school buildings are essentially empty and idle. By leaving the schools open late with homework help, recreation and games, and other planned activities, children have a safe and secure place to be. Every parent knows that one of the objectives of parenting is to reduce the opportunities and temptations for children to get into trouble by being by themselves or by being talked into trouble by others.

To learn more about the Fairfax County After-School Network, tune into my television program, Virginia Legislative Review, on Comcast Cable Channel 28 on Tuesday, September 14, at 7:30 p.m. or Wednesday, September 15, at 10:30 p.m. You can also visit the Fairfax Partnership for Youth website at www.fairfaxyouth.org and click on “Programs & Services.” To learn more about the Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force, go to www.fairfaxcounty.gov, type in “gangs” in the search bar, and then select an item called “Youth Gangs” for a wealth of information answering the most frequently asked questions about gang activity in our area. And as usual, if you want to comment to me on this or other issues, e-mail me at kenplum@aol.com.