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Posted on Thu, Apr. 22, 2010

# NJ mayor invites men to join anti-violence program

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The Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. - The mayor and the founder of an anti-violence group on Thursday invited male residents to join a program aimed at stemming crime in the weeks after the alleged gang rape of a 7-year-old girl in a gritty public housing building.

The Peace Keepers can serve as auxiliary police in neighborhoods where residents find themselves at odds with local law enforcement, founder Dennis Muhammad said. The group hopes to sign up at least 300 volunteers for those positions during a Saturday morning orientation at Lighthouse Outreach Ministry church.

"Some skeptics have said after the fanfare of the last rally that this would be over," Mayor Doug Palmer said Thursday, standing with Muhammad and several members of Fathers and Men United for a Better Trenton. "I said it before , I believe this time is going to be different."

The group, along with hip hop mogul Russell Simmons, held an April 10 rally organized after the alleged gang rape of a 7-year-old. Police said the girl was prostituted out by her 15-year-old stepsister to as many as seven men and boys at a party March 28.

Peace Keeper recruits will be trained in CPR, first aid and self-defense. They will also participate in a "people skills" seminar that will give non-confrontational techniques for approaching people. Those who complete the program will be issued ID cards and orange apparel, the official color of the Peace Keepers.

The men are then expected to serve for one hour each week on the streets and connect with youths in communities prone to violence.

Fathers and Men volunteer Abdul Muhammad said young people need to be shown love.

"We're coming from a community where violence is the theme of the day," he said. "You attack violence with love. We're coming with a message of love."

Trenton police Sgt. Pedro Medina said the department values the men's efforts.

"Our best resources are the community," he said. "They are our eyes and ears."


The mayor said the Peace Keeper recruits will continue a trend of declining violence in Trenton. A weekly public safety report published by Trenton police shows crime down by 22 percent since last year.

Palmer and Fathers and Men members attributed the decline to their efforts in the community.

Trenton's chapter of Peace Keepers would be the eighth established since the group launched in 2008. There are chapters in New Orleans, New York City, Jersey City, N.J., and Wilmington, Del. The group plans to debut in Trenton in May.

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