

The New York Times

Sunday, June 26, 1983

In Bronx, 'Desperadoes' Battle Crime

By KATHLEEN TELTSCH

When burglars broke into George and Hydee Matos's hardware store in the central Bronx last month for the third time in three years, they made off with electrical equipment valued at \$4,000. A few blocks away, within the last few weeks, thieves broke into a dress factory owned by Victor and Rose Davis, taking 13 sewing machines.

But both couples said they intended to stay in the neighborhood. And they talked optimistically the other day about a new anticrime program being organized by a coalition of local community groups called the Mid-Bronx Desperadoes. The coalition adopted the name Desperadoes nine years ago when it began working with local residents who were desperate for decent housing.

The campaign to reduce street violence and crime was initiated by the Eisenhower Foundation in Washington. The foundation said it expected to start similar programs in at least 10 other cities. The Bronx program is being financed by the Eisenhower Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation of New York and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, set up by the Ford Foundation to help revitalize deteriorating neighborhoods.

The sponsors provided \$60,000 to begin the two-year program, which they said would be designed to the community's wishes. The Ford Foundation had earlier provided \$430,000 to the Eisenhower Foundation for the national anticrime program. The money was matched by an additional \$430,000 raised locally from 30 corporations and foundations in 10 cities.

Survey on Bronx Crime

As a first step in the Bronx venture, Fordham University took a survey of 500 *residents* and owners of businesses about their fears of crime. Most people who responded said that automobile thefts, muggings, drug use and burglaries were their main concerns, according to Dr. Orlando Rodriguez, an associate at Fordham's Hispanic Research Center.

"People are afraid to go outside at night," Dr. Rodriguez said. He added that 40 percent of the residents are women who head their households. Those interviewed said they wanted to remain in the neighborhood, he said.

"People feel the worst has happened already and now conditions will be stable or move upward," he said. The community is almost evenly divided between black and Hispanic residents. At the Davis' dress factory, a modern shop employing 100 workers, the owners said they wanted local merchants to help pay for a security patrol in the area to augment police patrols of the 42d Precinct.

600 Buildings Renovated

The Mid-Bronx Desperadoes have rehabilitated 600 housing units in a 20-block corridor between 173d and 174th streets, running from Southern Boulevard to Bryant Avenue. About 6,000 tenants live in the renovated buildings, according to Genevieve Brooks, executive director of the nonprofit organization. She led a tour through the area last week for Dr. Lynn iA, Curtis, president of the Eisenhower Foundation, and Anita Miller, director of the Bronx program for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation. Dr. Curtis was told about a break-in at one of the buildings. Two youths spotted the thieves leaving with suspicious-looking bundle, alerted police and then chased them for several blocks along with score of local residents. They seized the burglars before the police arrived.

The youths were given awards at a party sponsored by the community yesterday. Two police officer from the 42d Precinct were also honored.

"That's the core of what we are doing here," Mrs. Brooks said. "Once people have a stake in their own neighborhood, we find crime rates go down and so does fear."

The Fordham researchers found residents favored setting up an escort service for elderly shoppers and using tenants as block watchers. The new program will begin in late July.

The Mid-Bronx Desperadoes' office at 1690, Vyse Avenue is in a low-rise apart-neat building shaded by honey locust trees and brightened by sidewalk planters of petunias. ••

Mrs. Brooks pointed to an abandoned building across the street, an eyesore amid the newly restored dwellings. She said the building would be rebuilt and would be the new offices for her organization.

The Mid-Bronx Desperadoes group is also a co-sponsor of a nearby housing development of one-family residences called Charlotte Gardens. Models of two of the neat, suburban-style houses surrounded by white picket fences recently went on sale.

"Come back in three years and it will all be reality," Mrs. Miller said of the improvements in the Bronx, "All it takes is vision and money."

© 1983 by The New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.