



AM

Volume 103, Number 97

Center • Torrington • Veteran • Yoder

'Gangs' draw area youth

By John Miller

Staff writer

Matt John has seen it all before during his tenure as Torrington Parks Department head; the vandalized and graffiti-laden

restrooms, graffiti on the park benches, and a general path of defaced property, particularly at City Park. And, as usual, he expected the mischief to increase with the start of the school year, as it always has.

And graffiti in a men's room is hardly a new development. But what caught his attention was the "gang type" of content he was finding scrawled

throughout the parks. Slogans proclaiming Southside 13, ICP, SUR 13 and other monikers can be found everywhere, especially in South Torrington.

According to Torrington Police Officer Diane Servantez, the graffiti, or "tagging," is the work of two Torrington gangs identifying with the city gangs Sureños 13 and Juggalos. And they are nothing new.

Traditionally, the reason people get involved in gangs is it's kind of like an extended family.

Diane Servantez
Torrington Police Dept.

She said when she was appointed school resource officer two years ago, the two factions were continually starting fights and

See 'GANGS', A8

'Gangs': appe

From page A1

causing problems with one another.

The schools have aggressively taken a "no tolerance" approach to the problem, and aside from occasional tagging in the restrooms, the incidents have all but vanished. But the animosity between the groups, along with a penchant for malicious mischief, has begun to spill onto the streets as incidents and crimes involving alleged members pile up.

Last year, a spray painting spree left many vehicles with SUR 13 painted on them. This summer, a string of burglaries of businesses and vehicles involved many youths associated with Sureños 13, although it's not clear whether the acts were gang-related or individual acts. In the past few weeks, vehicles owned by Sureños and Juggalos members alike were vandalized, with all their windows broken out and their tires flattened, Servantez said.

There have also been several gang fights between the two groups. One such incident happened at the county fair when several Juggalos attended the carnival in their signature clown makeup, prompting a scuffle with some Sureños members. And earlier this summer, a group of approximately 50 Juggalos descended on Jiridon Park in what was reportedly a showdown with Sureños, only to see several Torrington police vehicles arrive and disperse the group.

"For the most part, I would say they're just little wannabes that just cause problems for each other," Servantez said. "Even in gangs there's morals and standards you have to abide by. (These kids) just think it's cool."

But Shad Bates of Torrington's at-risk youth center Number 34 sees this as a problem in itself because the Torrington kids don't have any idea how real gangs actually operate, identifying only with what they see and hear in music and on the Internet. According to Bates, they may be potentially more dangerous because their concept is to simply be the baddest gang around and to retaliate against anyone who "disrespects" them.

"You would never see a gang member from Denver come here and shoot anybody," Servantez said. "But I could see one of these kids doing it. They just don't know any better."



The Sureños 13 gang began in Southern California, an offshoot of the Mexican Mafia in the 1960s. "Sureños" is Spanish for "southerners," while 13 stands for the 13th letter in the alphabet, "M," out of respect for the Mafia.

The gang, made up almost exclusively of Hispanics, monopolized the drug traffic in East Los Angeles, provoking violent and bloody confrontations with rival gangs over "turf," essentially their area of the city they claimed to sell drugs. During the

YOU

Dealing to some area youth

In years, SUR 13 has grown to populate virtually every major city in the Western United States.

Juggalos are a creation of the 90's rap band Insane Clown Posse, or ICP. In ICP's alternative universe, their fans are "juggalos" and "juggalettes," who in turn commit to a lifestyle based on the band's "message." The band performs in "evil clown" makeup, and though filled with coarse language and violent images, many juggalos claim the lyrical content is actually a device to show listeners the evil in life so that they may strive for something good.

Gangs of juggalos have cropped up in cities all over the country. However,

not all juggalos appear to grasp this interpretation as there have been several violent incidents involving them, including a pair in Pocono, Penn. accused of murder.

No member from either side would consent to an interview. An alleged SUR 13 juvenile in lockup at the Goshen County Jail simply told a sheriff's deputy "hell, no" when asked if he would talk to a reporter from the *Telegram*.

While the two gangs appear to be of quite disparate descent, Servantez sees a common thread motivating kids to join.

"Traditionally, the reason people get involved in gangs is it's kind of like an extended family," Ser-

vantez said. "That feeling of trust, somebody has my back, somebody loves me and cares for me and they'll stick by my side 24/7. I do see that these kids fit into that mentality."

"Most of them come from middle-class or lower-class families, most of them the parents are working and have other priorities, and they're not spending time with their kids doing family-oriented things. Not that the parents don't care, but I think the parents work and they have other priorities and sometimes they're (the kids) not getting what they need, and so they search for it elsewhere."



Ultimately, it may be

up to law enforcement to assess the disparate groups and bring forth a solution before the situation gets out of hand.

"A lot of people I grew up with have the belief that 'I don't need the police because I'll take care of you myself,'" Servantez said. "So one of these Sureños 13 went out and spray painted an elderly couple's fence. I said 'you should really call the police' and he said 'no, I'll take care of it.'"

"What these kids don't understand is a lot of that old school mentality, 'I'll take care of it myself,' those are the people they need to worry about. Those are the people who'll shoot first and ask questions later."