

Ex-gang members undergo program to sell new product

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Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Former gang members who used to sell drugs in the inner city are marketing a new product, one intended to keep them off the streets and away from a life of crime.

Ex-members of the Crips and Bloods, two predominately African-American gangs, have gone through a two-week training program designed to use their sales skills to unload a legal product — car cleaning supplies.

"This is a good program because it gives us a chance. That's all we were asking for — an opportunity to have jobs just like everybody else," said Raynell, 27, a one-time gangster who declined to give his last name or state which gang he was affiliated with.

The Crips and Bloods declared a truce April 29, following the acquittals of four white Los Angeles police officers accused of assaulting black motorist Rodney King.

One officer faces a retrial for one count of assault under color of authority. The King verdicts sparked four days of civil unrest that left more than 50 people dead and about 500 businesses damaged or destroyed.

The Rev. James Stern of

Gospel Night Ministries in Los Angeles initiated the four-hour a day class as a way to keep the peace between the two former rival gangs.

"When the Bloods and Crips announced a truce, the question everyone kept asking was, 'How long will it last?'" said Stern. "So we wanted to do something to promote social and economic opportunities for these young people."

The class emphasis is actually on construction work, not sales, according to instructor Patrick Curran.

Curran is the owner of a Hemet-based construction company. He agreed to become a volunteer instructor after seeing Stern and former gang members on television.

Curran, who has been in the construction business for 33 years, said he showed the students the tools of the trade, taught them demolition techniques and instructed them in handling hazardous waste.

The class has also reviewed basic math and vocabulary skills, Curran said.

Instructions are held at the House of Prayer Church on Avalon Boulevard and 87th Street in South Central.

Ten students — five ex-Crips and five former Bloods — became the first graduates to finish the free training program Friday. As of

Monday, 13 students were enrolled for the next two-week session, Curran said.

Graduates receive certificates stating they successfully completed the course. Curran said he will continue the class for as long as eager students want his instruction.

"These students are bright and they really want to learn. Everyone of them had a high school diploma and 'bhe had an A.A. degree," said Curran.

"There's no reason they shouldn't be out there working," he added.

Envirotech, a Las Vegas-based company, has agreed to hire each graduate as a salesperson within the company. The new employees can remain in Los Angeles and market Envirotech's products right in their own communities, a company spokesman said.

They will make a minimum base salary of \$9 per hour, plus commission, according to Stern.

"When people ask me are these kids going to make as much as they could selling crack on a street corner, I tell them no," said Envirotech spokesman Clifton Jolley.

But unlike selling drugs, "it's good money and it's safe money," Jolley said.

"They can make money day after day without fear for their lives or fear of going to jail," he said.

Dinkins speaks to graduates

NEWTON, Mass. (AP) — Contributions of minorities should not be ignored in American education as they have in the past, New York Mayor David Dinkins said at a private school commencement.

"Back when I went to school, we learned very little about contributions made by African Americans and other people of color to the history of the United States," Dinkins told the 38 graduates of the Beaver Country Day School on Monday.

"We learned even less about the contributions of Latinos or of Asians. The emphasis was always

upon the western Europeans who first claimed these lands for the crowned heads of Europe."

Dinkins said western culture need not be replaced, but only augmented.

"I am not talking here of replacing our western canon of literature, but rather about including multiple traditions," Dinkins said.

"I am suggesting that alongside our great works of English literature we also place on our shelves the books of Nobel laureates Naguib Mahfouz and Octavio Paz, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Toni

Morrison," he said.

"We must respect the identities of all Americans."

Four out of the 38 graduates of Beaver Country Day, a private school for grades six through 12, were black and two Hispanic.

Dinkins praised the school for a multiculturalism program that brings black South Africans, Native Americans, inner city residents and other students to the suburban campus. All students are encouraged to elect women's studies, black literature and other programs, headmaster Jerome Martin said

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