

46
YEARS

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• See Opinion/Forum pages on A4 & 5 •

• See Sports on page B1 •

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Time to 'give peace a chance'

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

In response to the recent rise in gun violence, three different neighborhoods did their part to stop the violence with a series of peace walks last weekend. The "Day of Peace" began in the Salem Gardens community and then picked up in the Cole Village community before wrapping up the day at Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in the Easton community.

Statistics show gun violence is on the rise across the country and Winston-Salem is no exception. There have been 18 homicides in Winston-Salem this year, and six of those occurred between June 1 and Aug. 5. During that same time period, the Winston-Salem Police Department (WSPD) received 849 calls related to the unlawful use of firearms and 49 people reported being shot.

Sophia Russell-Hall and David Villada who helped organize the Day of Peace in Cole Village said they believe that it's going to take the collaborative efforts of the entire community to make a difference.

"In order to see any true change, it will take the members of the community to work together," Russell-Hall said. "In my opinion, the proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child' truly speaks to the village coming together

for the betterment of their future. A future beyond the years of that one child. A future that will dictate how legacy and healing work happens."

Responding to the rise in gun violence, City Councilmembers Morticia "Tee-Tee" Parmon and Annette Scipio have called for the WSPD to do whatever it takes to stop the violence in their wards. Parmon, who represents the Northeast Ward, said, "Something has to happen." She called for the council to push for a zero tolerance policy within the WSPD when it comes to gun violence.

"As the City of Winston-Salem, we have to stand with our Winston-Salem Police Department and say that whatever you have to do to bring forth justice that these families need and to make sure that our neighborhoods are secure, then we stand with you to do," Parmon continued. "We hired them to do a job; don't restrict them or limit them on what it is we want them to do as long as they're enforcing the law and doing what they're hired to do."

Scipio, who represents the East Ward, said she receives calls and emails regularly about reports of gun shots. She said it is important that the community knows that they have the full support of the WSPD. She said the gun violence isn't about poverty and it's not some-



Residents and community leaders chat in Cole Village during the peace walks held in the Southeast Ward on Saturday, Aug. 29.

thing that can be fixed with civic groups and programs.

"This gun violence is not something that's going to be solved with a social program that's going to take two and three years to effect. This is not a social issue, this is very much like cancer," Scipio said.

Councilmember James Taylor, who is publisher of The Chronicle, argues that simply more policing isn't the only answer, which is why he collaborated with neighbors to organize the Day of Peace. He said the purpose of the event was to reach out to the people and make a communitywide push for peace. At each location on the Day of Peace, peace walkers went door-to-door conducting

surveys with residents and gathered information and ideas from them on how to best keep the community safe. There was also food and a live DJ at each location.

"We've had challenges in several communities," Taylor continued, "particularly Salem Gardens, Cole Village and Easton, and what you're seeing is neighbors pulling together, being vigilant and striving to have peace in the community."

Taylor, who represents the Southeast Ward and is chair of the Public Safety Committee, said although he supports the WSPD, instead of militarizing the police on our own neighbors, it's the duty of the

city council to actually reach out to the community and talk to them about how we can better serve them.

"Let's go in, talk to our neighbors, find out what they need, and if that's police presence we'll provide it. If it's programming, we'll provide it; if it's resources, we'll provide it," he said. How can elected officials speak for a community that they have never talked to or even attempted to meet with? So this Day of Peace is just about that, we're talking to people, finding out what they want, what they'll need, and we'll come back with results."

Russell-Hall said it's equally important that the

community has the support of property owners and management. "It will also take property owners/managers and landlords of certain communities to care. The support from the property owners and manager with Vista Realty (Cole Village/Pepperidge Apartments) have been amazing! It matters when those who own the property cares about the wellbeing and livelihood of their residents. Having their support when I posed the idea truly made it easier for me to organize the event," she said.

Villada, who is known throughout the community for his work to put a stop to the violence through his youth program Nuevo Vida (New Life), said he believes the Peace Walks is a step in the right direction. He said to make a difference you first have to build a working relationship and get to know the people in the community.

"We just can't provide survey with made-up questions and limited answers for the community to choose from and think then we can get enough information to come up with a solution," Villada continued. "No, we have to have dialogue ... we have to be able to relate to the community, understand where they come from so that we all can prosper from those who are true to wanting equality and prosperity for all. That's our model at New Life/Nueva Vida."

Free at Last

State drops case against Ronnie Long, Black man who spent 44 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

After spending the last 44 years behind bars for a crime he didn't commit, last week Ronnie Long was released from prison after his conviction was vacated by the state.

Long's release came after the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit ruled that due process rights were violated and sent the case back to the district court. Instead of a retrial the State of North



Ronnie Long moments after being released. Long spent 44 years in prison for a crime he didn't commit.

Carolina decided to no longer contest Long's conviction.

When he was only 19 years old, Long, who is

Black, was charged with the assault and rape of a white woman in her home on April 25, 1976. According to police reports, the

victim was the widow of a top executive at Cannon Mills, a major textile company and employer in the area. The victim described

her attacker as a "yellow-looking African American," wearing a leather jacket, a toboggan, and gloves. She told police her attacker came through an open window before pressing a knife against her neck and ripping her clothes off.

After she was unable to pick her attacker out of a lineup, two weeks after the assault, investigators with the Concord Police Department took the victim to the courthouse and told her that her attacker may or may not be in the courtroom, and asked her to identify anyone who looked "familiar."

Long was in the courtroom to settle a minor trespassing charge, but as soon as he stood up wearing a leather jacket, the victim identified him as her attacker. She later picked Long's photo out of a lineup where he was the only person wearing a leather jacket.

Despite having an alibi

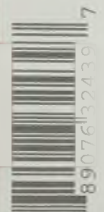
that placed him elsewhere at the time of the assault, and no physical evidence connecting him to the crime, on Oct. 1, 1976, Long was sentenced to serve 80 years in prison.

In his opening arguments, Jamie Lau, executive director of the Duke Law Wrongful Convictions Clinic, who has been working on Long's case since 2016, said the Concord Police Department deliberately suppressed evidence that proved Long's innocence and pointed to another suspect. Lau said the Concord Police Department's efforts to frame Long included the creation of a false police report and testifying falsely about the evidence they found at the crime scene.

"Suppressing the evidence prevented Long from presenting affirmative exculpatory evidence demonstrating that some-

See Free on A2

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