

Blacks Leaders, Residents Praise Hunt for Visit

◆ Governor says parents must get involved with youth to deter crime

By JOHN HINTON
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African American community leaders and residents praised Gov. Jim Hunt, D-N.C., for his visit to Happy Hill Gardens Housing Development last week.

"It was good for the governor to come to speak to the people themselves-up close," said State Rep. Larry Womble, D-Forsyth County. "It showed that the governor is sensitive to what is going on in that community."

Hunt toured the neighborhood and spoke to about 30 residents and Housing Authority of Winston-Salem officials at the Happy Hills Gardens Community Center. After stopping at Happy Hill Garden Mart, he heard the residents speak about how they reclaimed a neighborhood convenience store from drug dealers.

"The store was an eyesore," said Yvonne Jefferson, the president of the Happy Hills Resident Council. "If you wanted to buy drugs, you could buy them over the counter like anything else."

Hunt toured Happy Hills prior to his keynote address at the 13th Annual Crime Prevention in Public Housing Conference held in Winston-Salem last week. The N.C. Crime Prevention Division of the N.C. Department of Crime Control and Public Safety sponsored the conference.

Art S. Milligan, executive director of HAWS, invited the governor to visit Happy Hills. The governor told the residents that parents must get more involved with lives of children to reduce crime in Happy Hills



Gov. Jim Hunt, center, and his wife, Carolyn Hunt, right, pose for a picture with young residents of Happy Hills Gardens Housing Development. Hunt toured Happy Hills Gardens last week.

Gardens.

"Let's get parents and grandparents involved with the young people," Hunt said. "There is a lot they can do for their children to keep them from doing things that they should not be doing."

He praised the Winston-Salem Police Department's Foot Patrols in the community to curtail illegal drug sales. "Public housing communities should be as safe as any other community," he said.

Barbara Simmons, manager of Happy Hills Gardens, praised Hunt for his visit. "He let us know that he was concerned about the community and the young people here," she said. "There was genuine concern in

his voice," Womble said. "He threw the ball in their lap their to find out why parents are not coming out to help the young people."

William Tatum, president of the local chapter of the NAACP, also complimented the governor for visiting Happy Hills Gardens.

"It is good for the governor to come in and get in touch with grassroots people," he said. Hunt should have talked how federal cutbacks may affect state funded programs for drug abuse prevention, job creation, and education, Tatum said.

"The parents would be more likely to devote more time to their children if they didn't have to worry about programs that

would be cut," he added.

Hunt's visit was an opportunity for the residents to see the state's top elected official, said Mutter Evans, owner of WAAA-AM Radio Station.

"I would give the benefit of the doubt that he cared about the people who lived there," she the governor saying it makes it any more potent."

Hunt showed his character by visiting Happy Hills Gardens, said Delores "D" Smith, president of the Winston-Salem Urban League.

The governor must become an advocate for the people he interacted with in Happy Hills, she added.

"They need jobs, training,

and education," Smith said. "Visiting Happy Hills is one thing. Helping the residents there is another thing." Not everyone was happy with the governor's visit.

Roz Fox, the producer and director of the Martin Luther King Day Celebration by the N.C. Black Repertory, said that she didn't like the governor's visit or statements.

"It is self-help solution to violence and crime in our neighborhood, but I didn't like the governor making a campaign year stop in the black community to tell us that," Fox said. "I don't like white folk coming to our neighborhood and telling us what to do. He (Hunt) should have enough common sense to know it is a self-help solution. The people who live there know

what to do."

Clay Johnson, the governor's deputy press secretary, defended Hunt's visit to Winston-Salem.

"He wasn't trying to tell anybody what to do," Johnson said. "He was quite impressed with what the people in that community were doing."

Some black leaders questioned the political motives of Hunt visiting Happy Hills during an election year.

Hunt is expected to seek his fourth term as governor and faces no Democratic opposition for the May 1996 primary.

"Is he not suppose to go somewhere because it is a campaign year," Johnson said, adding that Hunt's trip was an official state function. "It was very relevant to what he was doing that day."

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