

# THE CHRONICLE

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## Peace treaty holding firm

BY TIMOTHY RAMSEY  
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Originally there was an agreement for three weeks of peace between the Latin gangs in the southeast region of the city. Now that we have seen almost two months of nonviolence, the peace treaty is giving birth to additional opportunities in the area.

David Villada, founder of Beating up Bad Habits nonprofit organization, played an integral role in bringing the gang leaders together for the initial sit-down through his work with the nonprofit and being a bail bondsman.

"A lot of these kids that have either been the victim or the one doing the crime have been through my program," said Villada. "It bothers me that this stuff is going on, so I have been trying to bring peace."

Following the two recent homicides that took place on Cole Road, Villada said they "hit him hard" because he knew both of the families.

"Both young men lacked a male figure in their lives, so it was easy for them to turn to the streets and turn to the gangs and a lot of times this is what happens," he said. "Gang life is either you end up in jail or you end up dead."

Villada felt he had to do something to curb the rise in violence. Soon afterwards, two of the area gangs reached out to him to organize some sort of cease fire.

"Seeing that I am a mediator and a civilian and I know some of the people in the community, they reached out to me," said Villada. "So, I reached out to the rest of the gangs little by little and we were able to have a sit-down."

Villada coordinated with several individuals for the sit down. Effrainguan Muhammad was one of the individuals at the meeting. Muhammad and Villada have worked together for years to subdue the gang violence in the area, including doing several peace walks. Villada commended Muhammad for his de-escalation techniques and says Muhammad has taught him a lot throughout their relationship.

Muhammad is the Winston-Salem



Photo by Alphonso Abbott Jr.

What started as a three-week peace treaty has extended into eight weeks of no gang violence.

representative of the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan and the local Nation of Islam. He stated his involvement was inspired by Minister Farrakhan.

"Over the years, Brother David and I have worked together in the community, both in the Hispanic and African American communities," Muhammad said. "So, when he reached out to me, after speaking with various young men who had a desire to resolve their issues, I was happy and excited because of our work in the past mediating beefs in the community between rival parties."

Muhammad said because the parties

involved were seeking peace in the community, it was a lot easier for all individuals to be in agreement.

"We give the praise and glory to God, because only God could have inspired, in the hearts of these young men, the desire to want to resolve their conflicts and keep the peace as long as it has been," Muhammad said. "Initially the agreement with the parties was for a ceasefire for three weeks as we try to work on how we could maintain going forward. So, it has been a blessing that here we are at seven, going into eight weeks of peace now."

According to Villada, with all of the positive influences in the room, they were going to get the attention of the gangs in attendance.

"We told them that enough is enough and we had to bring peace to the streets, because the police were going to be patrolling more and it brings more problems to not only them, but their families and the community," he said. "We continuously talk with them and we de-escalate issues before any actions are taken."

Villada and Muhammad also connected with James Taylor, councilman for the Southeast Ward, about bringing jobs to the area, because they know that will also have an impact on lowering the violent crime in the area. Taylor was able to partner Villada's nonprofit with a local contractor for employment opportunities for some of the young men in the area.

"We just want them to let us work and put these young men in the same community to work and be productive," Villada said. "When they work, you keep them busy and off the streets and also put money in their pockets. With money in your pocket, who is not happy?"

Muhammad thinks it would not only benefit the young men, but also the city, if more resources related to employment were given to the Southeast Ward.

"A lot of our young brothers are not in that lifestyle because they choose to, a lot of times it's because society has failed them and doesn't care," he said. "To encourage them and support them by putting tangible resources in their hands will go

a long way in them self-maintaining the peace they have initiated and understanding the value of the peace to themselves, to their families and to their greater community.

"I think it would be a tragedy if the city and those in business leadership would not support these young people in these efforts in whatever way possible."

To help some of the young men achieve success in the workforce, Villada collaborated with Lizbeth Sanchez and Adela Patricia of Equal Opportunity Staffing, which is a temporary employment agency that will work with some of the young men even if they have a troubled history with law enforcement.

"Being Hispanic, we also have family that goes through that and it is really hard for them to take care of their families, especially once they are released from incarceration," said Sanchez about why their organization decided to partner with Villada, "instead of them going back to that life, because they have been rejected from employment because of their history. If these companies are willing to work with us to give them a second chance, then we are willing to be responsible for them to make sure they show up for the job."

Patricia added, "I have friends and family that have been denied jobs based on their record. I do believe in second chances and I want to help those that want to be helped. I am a single mother and the thing that touched me the most was when a five-year-old boy was killed in his home by a stray bullet and I want to be able to give my son a better future and give other families a better future as well."

Villada and Muhammad are hoping this peace treaty will continue for as long as possible and praying that employment opportunities continue to be placed in the area.

"I can't do it by myself, Brother Muhammad can't do it by himself, but it is a team effort," Villada continued. "To see this is happening, shows that the effort we all have been putting in is working. It just took time."



Submitted photo

The peace treaty among the Latin gangs in the Southeast Ward is picking up steam.

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