

# National Victims' Rights Week



**Ask  
the  
Mayor**

by Mayor  
John  
Peyton

On the heels of hosting one of the safest and most welcoming Super Bowls ever, Jacksonville got yet another boost recently when a report announced that crime rates in our city have dropped. This past year marks the sixth consecutive time that Jacksonville has experienced a decrease in reported incidents of violent crime. Clearly, our city has made great strides in addressing public safety and quality of life, and I remain committed to doing all I can to make Jacksonville the safest city in America.

Government has long played a primary role in

ensuring the safety of citizens. Public safety at the local level is analogous to defense at the national level: a primary responsibility of government. My first order of business upon taking office was to make certain our uniformed men and women had the training, facilities, apparatus and technology needed to protect our citizens. And as part of my Safety First Initiative, this year's city budget provided capital and operating dollars to supply firefighting equipment, modernize fire stations and construct much-needed new fire stations.

Working to protect Jacksonville on a larger scale, I recently partnered with Sheriff Rutherford and area congressional leaders to successfully encourage the Department of Homeland Security to designate

Jacksonville as a recipient of homeland security funding through the Urban Area Security Initiative. This designation will bring close to \$7 million to our city to help identify even more creative ways to prevent and be prepared for terrorism.

There is much still to be done, however – and as long as crime exists, there will be victims of crime. For the last 18 years, the Mayor's Victim Assistance Advisory Council (VAAC) has been working to ensure that victims of crime are protected from further harm and provided with the support they need. This 27-member panel is comprised of community members with varied backgrounds in areas such as mental health, criminal justice and education. In support of victims' rights, the VAAC is charged with

monitoring the performance quality of the justice system, evaluating public policy, advocating legislation and enhancing public awareness. In their campaign to increase public awareness about victims' rights, the VAAC will be taking part in National Victims' Rights Week 2005, which is April 10 through 16. This campaign will include a candlelight vigil at Friendship Park, a seminar and awards luncheon and demonstrations by Men Against Violence Against Women.


By hosting this annual event and a multitude of programs throughout the year, the council continues to help victims of crime and support victim

service programs. It has had a powerful effect on changing laws, policies and attitudes locally to promote victims' rights and contributes greatly to the social and cultural fabric of our city. The work the council does on behalf of Jacksonville's victims and their families plays an important part in their recovery and is a vital resource for our citizens.

While Jacksonville has come a long way toward improving crime rates and responding to the needs of victims, it still has room to grow. I encourage you to take part in the National Victims' Rights Week festivities and join with me in the fight to make Jacksonville the safest city in America.

# \$40,000

## REWARD



Hiep Nguyen,

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