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 MISSING PERSONS FOUND **161**

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# VICTIMS' ADVOCATE

JUSTICE COALITION'S

AUGUST 2009

WWW.JUSTICECOALITION.ORG

Volume 15 • Number 5 • FREE

## Cracking Down on Florida's Gang Problem



Attorney General Bill McCollum addressed Florida's gang problem in his weekly newsletter, *Generally Speaking*, July 10, 2009:

Over the past several years gang violence has increased in our state and has become a serious threat to our neighborhoods, children and safety. Last year, I worked closely with the Florida Legislature to significantly strengthen our anti-gang laws, giving prosecutors better tools to fight criminal gangs.

Since the law went into effect, we are seeing a substantial difference in the cases my Office of Statewide Prosecution has brought against gang members. One of the most notable successes is currently developing in Manatee County. To date 14 members of the Third Shift Gang, a violent narcotics trafficking gang, have been sentenced to prison terms for criminal gang activities, and yesterday one of those members was sentenced to 25 years in prison. In West Palm Beach, my office has obtained 25-year sentences for two members of the Top 6 gang, and is currently prosecuting several other members, as well.

The law enforcement and prosecution component of our statewide gang reduction strategy is only part of the solution. Communities, parents and educators need to band together to help prevent these gangs from recruiting our children as members. Our task is far from complete and only with cooperation will we truly shift the tide. More information about the strategy and gang reduction task forces is available online at <http://www.safeflorida.net>.

### RICO Arrests

At a press conference on June 25, Sheriff John Rutherford, along with many other members of local law enforcement agencies, announced that after an 18-month investigation, key members of the 103rd Street CHB (Certified Head Bustas) gang were arrested and charged with 204 felonies and 221 misdemeanors, and 21 guns were seized.

"Since 2004 this criminal street gang has been operating its criminal enterprise with membership of about 36. The original members, who grew up and attended high school together, range in age from 18

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## Jury returns GUILTY verdict for Effie Ratley's killer

Prosecutors seek death penalty for Michael Ratley

By Shirley Shaw

When the shrill ring of the bedside phone awakened Duane and Joy Williams at 4:30 a.m., they knew something was terribly wrong. The caller told them their daughter, Effie Ratley, had been injured in a fall and was being life-flighted to Shands Trauma Center in Jacksonville. They had no way of knowing this day, Jan. 27, 2007, would be the onset of utter devastation in their lives.

The ER physician told them Effie had sustained life-threatening injuries to her right temporal brain, with brainstem detachment, her skull crushed from blunt force trauma. She had not been injured in a fall; someone had viciously, deliberately beaten this young mother. Paramedics placed her on life support at the crime scene, it was discontinued on Jan. 31, and she died. She was only 29 years old.

From the beginning, Duane and Joy didn't believe the account of events Effie's husband and his parents related to authorities, and ensuing different scenarios Michael Ratley presented added to their - and detective's - suspicions. The young couple had been staying with his parents after their house had burned down in Bryceville exactly one month before the incident. Ironically, Michael was hailed a hero at the time for rescuing his wife and infant

from the burning structure.

Now detectives considered the "hero" to be the main suspect and pursued their investigation into Effie's homicide. Besides finding wire cutters, heavy gloves and a bloody hammer in Michael's truck, they also found narcotics hidden under the seat they traced back to a \$1500 theft from St.



Vincent's Hospital during the time Effie was delivering her baby.

Michael Ratley was charged with his wife's murder in Sept. 2007, and went on trial July 13, 2009. Following the guilty verdict of first-degree murder, Joy (Effie's stepmother - her biological mother stood by to testify in behalf of her daughter's murderer) spoke to the media: "This is one door, and I'm sure there will be many more we'll have to go through and then close behind us. Will it ever ease the pain of losing a child? No. Especially in such a horrific manner. No. But it does give us validation, not only to her father and

me, but to her friends who loved and adored her and have suffered a great loss, along with her family."

Shortly after his daughter's death, Duane Williams had come to the Justice Coalition office for help. For years, every Sunday after church, the Williamses ate lunch at Sonny's Barbecue on Lane Avenue. He would pick up the latest edition of the *Victims' Advocate* and look through it while waiting to eat. Always sympathetic about the victims whose stories were related, he never in a million years dreamed he would one day require the services of the Justice Coalition, or that his own daughter's story would be told in its publication.

Ann Dugger spent hours with him that first day he came to the office, and when he reached home, Duane told his wife, "I know we're going to be OK." Joy says throughout the ordeal of dealing with all the issues involved in the judicial process, members of the Justice Coalition were always right by their side, and they are so grateful for the help they received.

As the tired, but relieved, parents were driving home following the trial, they looked out the window of their car and saw a beautiful rainbow in the sky. Duane had been commenting for months that, despite all the storms and rain we've had in the area, he had not seen a rainbow. But, today of all days, there it was. A reminder to them of God's faithfulness in bringing justice for their daughter's death.

"We love you, Effie; rest in peace."

## Ted Hires Legacy Award Dinner

Sept. 17, 6:00 p.m. at North Jax Baptist Church

**Ted Hires Legacy Outstanding Citizen Award** - recognizes a victim or survivor of violent crime who has exhibited exceptional perseverance or determination in dealing with his or her own victimization. It may also acknowledge an individual who has acted bravely either to aid a victim or to prevent a victimization.

Applicable violent crimes are: murder, manslaughter, homicide,

vehicular assault and vehicular homicide, assault, sexual assault on an adult or child, sexual exploitation of children, kidnapping, robbery, child abuse, and domestic violence.

**Ted Hires Legacy Business Award** - recognizes a local business owner, corporation, or organization outside the victim assistance field for service to victims and/or contribution to victims of violent crime. The

recipient of this award will be honored for selfless efforts to reach out to victims and/or their families.

**Ted Hires Legacy Government Agency Award** - honors a government agency/ organization for its service to victims of violent crime. The award recognizes a professional's exceptional contributions and extraordinary impact on behalf of victims of violent crime.

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