

## Ask the Mayor July 2007

I want to begin this month by offering the sympathy and condolences of the city to the family of Mrs. Taylor. Everyone I have spoken with since the shooting has expressed horror and outrage that such a thing could happen in our town - that a woman standing on her front porch on a beautiful summer afternoon, surrounded by family and friends should be shot to death - an innocent victim of an apparent gang dispute. I am confident that our police will arrest the persons responsible for this crime and that they will be brought to trial and that justice will be done.

Unfortunately however, the bravest policemen and the most dedicated prosecutors cannot prevent the barbaric violence that comes with gangs. That job falls on us as a community. All of us - as mothers and fathers, friends, relatives, neighbors - must commit ourselves never to tolerate the seduction of our children into gang life. Children lost to gangs become agents of misery and destruction, wasting their own lives and breaking the hearts of their loved ones.

The three strongest antidotes to the poison of gangs are family, school and church. We must be sure that our children understand that much is expected of them and know that they will be challenged to the limits of their capability. We have wonderful teachers, ministers and coaches in our town who have dedicated their lives to this work. Support them! Let our children know that these are the proper role models they should aspire to - not the thug with the gun.

Bridgeton is a poor town. But poverty is not the cause of gangs and money is not the magic cure for them. Most of the families of Bridgeton have good values that they are passing on to their children - raising them to be decent people, caring neighbors and responsible citizens. The cause for the rise of gangs is spiritual poverty. Angry children who feel no connection with the community and no hope for the future are vulnerable to the gang's attraction. The gang offers them a terrible kind of power - the power of the strong to prey on the weak.

Even though our town is poor, we have fine schools that will prepare our children to go as far as their own ability and determination can carry them. Don't let your child give up! Be a partner to his teacher. Help your child with his homework and praise him when he does well. Be active in the parent's association and volunteer at the school.

Bridgeton also has a wonderful athletic tradition. Few cities our size have produced so many world class athletes and championship teams. Encourage your children to get involved in organized sports. It is often said that children join gangs because they are like families. Let our children find the companionship they seek on a sports team where they will build their body and learn the life lessons of teamwork and fair play.

Our city is also blessed with many churches and our ministers and priests are a great bulwark against the temptations of gang life. Take your children to church and get them involved in the youth groups and after-school programs that are available there. If you suspect your child is being recruited into a gang call on your minister for help.

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The most important work of each generation is to nurture the one that comes after us. This is the way that civilization has been built and preserved through all of human history. In our time and in a nation more prosperous and technically advanced than any in history, we are threatened with a break in that chain of civilization. We must not allow mindless violence and a degraded popular culture overcome what is good and decent in Bridgeton.

Please contact my office by phone 856-455-3230 Ext. 200 if you would like my help or e-mail at [mayor@cityofbridgeton.com](mailto:mayor@cityofbridgeton.com) . I will stand shoulder to shoulder with anyone, anytime. My concern is and has been to make this city a safe place for all.