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HATE VIOLENCE: Six people face charges in Denver, accused of beating a black woman after she asked whether they were skinheads. The attack is the latest in a series of suspected hate crimes in Denver in recent weeks. Shomie Francis, 26, told police the suspects used a racial slur and beat her at a convenience store on Thanksgiving Day. She was treated for cuts on her face. Five adults and a juvenile were arrested for investigation of ethnic intimidation and assault. Concern about hate crimes grew after the fatal shootings of a police officer and a West African man. Suspects in the killings have ties to white supremacists.

4-B Thursday, December

Clinton defends race initiative

WASHINGTON — Bristling at suggestions that his national dialogue on race is weak and unfocused, President Clinton says such criticisms are inevitable but promises "better results as we go forward."

That assertion was tested Wednesday, when his race advisory board met in Fairfax County, Va., to discuss issues of race in elementary and high schools. The Washington suburb has one of the country's most diverse school systems.

Clinton has told board members he wanted them to visit Fairfax to learn "how they're dealing with this, and whether there are any lessons there that we can learn for the rest of the country."

LOCAL NEWS

Dec. 31 is applic for area Weed and

By JODI M. SCOTT
Times Staff Writer

VALDOSTA — Valdosta residents must be prepared to work together in order to have a successful Weed and Seed program, according to an assistant U.S. attorney.

"It's like a family," Wanda Keyes Heard, assistant U.S. attorney on detail as special assistant to the director of the executive office for Weed and Seed. "It's called give and take. Sometimes you get what you want and sometimes you don't. That's what Weed and Seed is."

Heard visited Valdosta on Monday to answer questions about the federal community revitalization program, which started under the Bush administration in the early 1990s. There currently are 140 Weed and Seed cities in the United States, of which 104 are receiving federal funding. Savannah and Atlanta are the only sites in Georgia.

In order to become Weed and Seed sites, communities must implement a strategy to clean up and revitalize and then apply for official recognition. Valdosta Police Chief Frank Simons said Valdosta has begun working on its strategy with a recent round-up of drug dealers and a day-long demolition blitz of substandard houses.

Applications must be submitted to the U.S. Department of

Justice by Dec. 31. Simons said a steering committee is about "halfway through" with the city's application. Four public hearings were held to determine the main concerns of residents in the Weed and Seed area, which include District 1, south of Hill Avenue, east of South Oak Street and west of North Fry Street; District 2, south of East Brookwood, north of Hill Avenue, west of North Forrest and east of Lee to Gordon; and District 3, south of Gordon, north of Hill and west of Ashley.

Four committees, made up of residents, were formed to develop strategies for law enforcement, community policing, prevention, intervention and treatment and neighborhood revitalization. Those four areas are required as part of the Weed and Seed strategy, Heard said.

If Valdosta is accepted as a Weed and Seed site, it becomes eligible for federal funds for three years. Last year, Weed and Seed sites were each approved for \$340,000. Head said the funds are used for law enforcement and social programs. One requirement to receive the funds is that the police department must work with a federal law enforcement agency since the money comes from federal asset forfeitures. Simons said Valdosta plans to work with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Drug Enforcement Agency.

Education dea and Seed p

If strategies are successful, sites can apply for additional funds, and are given top priority in receiving money from other federal agencies, such as the Housing and Urban Development Department.

One resident attending the Monday asked who will handle the grant money. Heard said it can be handled by local governments, a non-profit organization or other agency chosen by the steering committee. Simons said the selection for the grantee has not yet been made.

But Heard cautioned that the money should not become the focus of Weed and Seed. After three years, the funding will end

adline program

and Valdosta must be prepared to continue the program.

Weed and Seed communities also must designate safe havens where residents can go in times of trouble. Simons said the two proposed havens for Valdosta include a school on Magnolia Street and the former Leila Ellis' school on Lee Street.

City seeks Weed and Seed status

Weed and Seed

By JODI M. SCOTT
Times Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the first in a five-part series examining the city of Valdosta's plans for the federal Weed and Seed community revitalization program. Following today's overview, the series will address specific parts of the Weed and Seed strategy.

VALDOSTA — Valdosta's application to become an official Weed and Seed federal community revitalization site will be sent next week to the U.S. Department of Justice, with a response expected in January.

Under Weed and Seed, communities work to "weed out" crime and then "seed" change through social services, economic development and neighborhood restoration. There are 140 Weed and Seed cities in the United States, with 104 receiving federal funding. Savannah and Atlanta are the only sites in Georgia.

In order to become Weed and Seed sites, communities must implement strategies to cleanup and revitalize and then apply for official recognition. The strategy must address law enforcement, community policing, prevention, intervention and treatment and economic revitalization.

A determination on whether Valdosta is named a Weed and Seed site could come as early as January. If Valdosta is named a site, it will become eligible for federal funds, which will be announced in February.

The Weed and Seed strategy targets three neighborhoods for revitalization. The 2.2 square miles are bounded by East Brookwood Drive, Forrest Street, Old Statenville and Hightower Street.

The area was selected based on the high rate of violent crime (with 3,738 felonies in 1996), drug activity, people under correctional supervision, substance abuse, homelessness, unemployment, teen pregnancy, public assis-

tance, school drop-outs, single parent homes and child abuse and poverty.

The area also was targeted because of its potential for revitalization. Residents have expressed cautious enthusiasm for Weed and Seed, but noted past programs have never led to improvement, according to the strategy.

According to the 1990 census, 12,424 people live in the target area, representing 4,336 households. The per capita income is \$6,116, and the median income ranges from \$6,032 to \$16,193.

The total labor force is 4,807 with 558 people listed as unemployed. Of the labor force, 2,378 are women.

Valdosta's strategy will specifically address job training and opportunities, drug enforcement, neighborhood cleanup, public transportation, violent crimes prevention, elimination of gangs, a safe haven, repairing derelict homes, demolishing dilapidated

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homes, speed control, entrepreneurship and access to social services. The list was developed through a series of public meetings with area residents.

The labor force is impacted by the lack of a public transportation system. There are fewer than four taxis in the area. Medicaid-paid vans have left the area due to changes in payment structures at the state level. Due to lack of transportation, many elderly residents and those who live alone become victims of crime because they have to walk crime-infested streets, according to the strategy. Locally owned businesses also have left the areas due to the crime rate, leaving vacant structures and lack of shopping and business opportunities.

The strategy notes that "Valdosta is beginning to experience an increase in the number

area is replete with open-air drug sales that breed related crime.

Houses and businesses are owned by people who do not maintain them in safe and appropriate conditions. Repairs by absentee landlords are not done in a timely manner, making the structures unsafe. According to the strategy, "low-cost loans for renovation, remodeling and repair for homeowners have not been available from local lending institutions."

Valdosta's draft application for official recognition was sent this week to the office of U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Georgia. Attorney Beverly Martin and her staff, who have been involved in the project since the beginning, will review the application and make any recommended changes.

Valdosta Police Chief Frank

SATURDAY

December 27, 1997

The Valdosta Daily Times

VPD has ambitious plans for Weed & Seed

Editor's note: This is the second in a five-part series examining the city of Valdosta's plans for participation in the federal Weed and Seed community revitalization program.

By JODI M. SCOTT
Times Staff Writer

VALDOSTA — City officials hope the Weed and Seed program will provide a boost in the effort to curtail drugs, gangs and related crimes.

Law enforcement makes up a large part of the Weed and Seed program, which includes cooperation between local, state and federal agencies. The city of Valdosta is seeking to participate in the Weed and Seed program, to weed out crime and revitalize neighborhoods by sowing progress. The program includes significant federal funding.

The Weed and Seed strategy targets three neighborhoods for revitalization. The 2.2 square miles are bounded by East Brookwood Drive, Forrest Street, Old Statenville and Hightower Street.

Local residents identified drugs as a major problem during a number of Weed and Seed programs. Many residents noted that drug trafficking regularly takes place on city streets. According to the Valdosta Police Department's strategy outlined in its Weed and Seed funding application, "Drug trafficking, open air drug markets, crack houses and drug possession are pervasive in the target area. The resulting substance abuse affects families by keeping parents unemployed, contributing to crime by people who take drugs and tempting young people to enter the drug trade."

The city hopes to reduce the number of known drug locations and drug traffickers by arresting offenders or limiting the opportunities to make sales of drugs and contraband; to use asset forfeiture laws to seize the assets of drug dealers and reduce the motivation to sell illegal drugs and to use seized assets to invest in law enforcement strategy.

The strategy includes surveillance to confirm drug locations, financial investigations to trace illegal drug proceeds, roadblock checkpoints, buy-bust operations, reverse stings, crack house investigations and work with other agencies to ensure comprehensive efforts.

The VPD will continue to use its six-person narcotics unit and the six-person tactical squad in the Weed and Seed area. The units began work using \$12,000 in surveillance and investigation equipment obtained through a Department of Justice grant and \$200,000 in other grant funds to purchase more equipment.

The second problem identified is violent crime, which includes armed and unarmed robberies, aggravated assaults and batteries, child abuse and domestic violence.

The VPD wants to establish an organized and coordinated effort with members of a Weed Task Force to address the problems, develop an area-specific crime analysis, purchase computerized communications and reporting equipment and buy additional equipment for use in surveillance and investigations.

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Weed

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Another problem is property crimes. The VPD said 947 property crimes took place in the area from November 1996 to October 1997. The objectives are to develop specially trained property crimes investigators, provide additional crime prevention training, work with businesses to help reduce shoplifting, use non-traditional patrol methods such as bicycle, foot and mounted patrol, work with Neighborhood Watch programs. The VPD also plans to use the COPS phone program, which provides residents with cellular phones to report crimes in progress.

The final problems addressed by the law enforcement strategy are juvenile crime and criminal gang activity. The VPD hopes to identify the existing gang structure, members and associates, provide anti-gang and anti-violence education, prosecute, convict and incarcerate gang members and juvenile offenders and provide alternative activities to youth.

The strategy proposes to decrease juvenile and gang violence by development of a gang enforcement unit at the police department. Funds would be used

to purchase computer software and notebook computers to list and track juvenile and gang offenders, add an additional prosecutor and secretary to the District Attorney's office to prosecute narcotics, juvenile and gang offenses, coordinate youth prosecution efforts with the Department of Children and Youth Services and partner with the Valdosta Parks, Recreation and Community Affairs Office to provide youth activities.

Valdosta plans to work with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency and prosecutors from the Southern Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office and the Office of the U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Georgia in implementing the strategies.

Weed and Seed would destroy derelict housing

Editor's note: This is the final story in a five-part series examining the city of Valdosta's plans for the federal Weed and Seed community revitalization program.

By **JODI M. SCOTT**
Times Staff Writer

VALDOSTA — Vacant and dilapidated houses are not only eyesores in Valdosta neighborhoods, but they also attract vermin, vagrants and drug abusers, according to residents.

In Weed and Seed public hearings, residents identified repair of derelict housing and demolition of vacant houses as two of their major concerns.

"We have drug problems, burned houses and dilapidated houses that need to be torn down," one resident said.

Others pointed to slumlords and absentee landlords as causes of the problem.

As part of the city's Weed and Seed strategy, conditions of salvageable occupied homes would be improved, while those cannot be saved would be destroyed. The goals are part of the strategy's neighborhood restoration section.

"Dilapidated and unsafe housing is endemic in the Weed and Seed area (bounded by East Brookwood Drive, Forrest Street, Old Statenville Highway and Hightower Street)," the strategy statement notes. "Landlords, most of whom do not live in the area, do not maintain the homes in which their renters live at acceptable standards of living."

The city proposes to survey residents to determine their housing needs, list the houses to consider for repair, determine how to gain funds for repairs, work with local banks to access Community Reinvestment Act

funds for renovation and restoration, use local contractors and labor when possible, provide on-site training so residents can learn building trades and hold public meetings to share the information.

In order to reduce the number of absentee landlords, the city will identify renters who want to own their houses and help them obtain low-cost mortgages from local banks.

According to the strategy, nine of the 10 local banks participate in a banking coalition formed by Valdosta Project Change. The coalition will be asked to provide loans for home ownership. NationsBank, which is located in the target area, already has committed its resources to the program.

Valdosta has applied for \$192,938 from the community home investment program (CHIP) grant through the Department of Community Affairs. If the grant is approved, the city would construct nine homes on lots seized through condemnation proceedings. Three of the homes would be constructed by Habitat for Humanity.

The strategy also proposes to eliminate buildings that cannot be saved. The city keeps a list of substandard and vacant houses, which number about 120. About 26 homes are demolished each year.

In November, the city held a day-long blitz, in which 10 houses were destroyed using donated equipment. The city now hopes to demolish 10 houses a month using the "Fast Track" civil condemnation process used in Macon.

The strategy also includes cleaning up unsightly vacant lots.

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Housing

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The city plans to develop parks and gardens on some lots and encourage home building on some lots.

Trash and litter also have been identified as problems. The city proposes to organize cleanup programs and establish incentive campaigns to encourage cleanup.

The final issue addressed in the neighborhood revitalization section is the lack of business opportunities. The city wants to increase the number of residents who own businesses. It will do so by residents scout locations and provide business start-up information.

An advisory group made up of residents, an economic development specialist from the chamber of commerce and a local banker will identify properties with development potential. The group will seek donated services from architects and engineers to determine what should be done to bring sites up to standards.

The group also will help potential owners obtain low-cost mortgage loans, while the University of Georgia Small Business Development Center will provide start-up instructions, business, strategic and marketing plans and financial and personnel management at no cost.

Racial sensitivity measured in words

The embarrassing comments made by Fuzzy Zoeller toward Tiger Woods are history, but the event should not pass without everyone learning a lesson about racial sensitivity.

Zoeller and Woods, of course, are professional golfers who are complete opposites when it comes to age, race and career experience. Zoeller is a former champion, while Woods is the newly-crowned Masters king. Zoeller, 45, is white and Woods, 21, is the child of a black father and an Asian mother.

Zoeller's remarks came in a CNN interview about an hour after he finished the final round of the Masters, which the 21-year-old Woods won to become the first person of color to win a major title. The interview was broadcast a week after the Masters.

"That little boy is driving well and he's putting well," Zoeller told CNN. "He's doing everything it takes to win. So you know what you guys do when he gets in here? You pat him on the back and say congratulations and enjoy it and tell him not to serve fried chicken next year. Got it?"

Zoeller snapped his fingers, turned to walk away, then added, "Or collard greens or whatever the hell they serve."

As a result of the comments, Kmart withdrew its sponsorship of Zoeller on the PGA tour and Fuzzy withdrew from the Greater Greensboro Chrysler Classic until he could personally apologize to Woods.

Zoeller, one of the PGA's most-loved pros, has been a crowd favorite because of his wit and clever one-liners. This time, however, his efforts to be funny backfired.

Many observers say Zoeller's comments were taken to an extreme.

"I don't know why everyone has to turn everything into a racial thing," said one radio talk show host in Valdosta last week. "Fuzzy was making a joke, and he has apologized for it."

The reason the comments drew such attention is because they are representative of a form of racism that is deeply rooted in our social fabric. While such comments are considered harmless by some, others feel their implications deeply. They see the words as a way for one race to maintain control and power. And power is precisely what racism is all about.

Certainly, there are daily examples of sensitivity — or a lack of it — being blown out of proportion by the media. Also, too, "political correctness" is used as a scapegoat by the ignorant and ill-advised. In order to reach a plateau where a joke is seen for what it is, we must pay careful attention to the intent of our remarks in advance of making them. To pretend that racially slanted comments are simply jest, with no deeper meaning, is to ignore our collective history.

In a similar vein, some members of this community find distasteful the bantering that goes on between white members of city government and Councilman Hoke Hampton, a popular member of the black community.

At Thursday's city council meeting, Hampton was the only member of the board to vote against the adoption of a promotion policy for the Valdosta Police Department.

"My main concern is that I can't sit here and vote for something that 140 people don't know about," Hampton said. Mayor James Rainwater replied that Hampton often voted on items that "45,000 people don't know about."

Friday, during grand opening ceremonies for the new Lowe's Distribution Center, Rainwater wanted to credit members of city council for their work in bringing the new industry to our city. He said he wanted members of city council to raise their hands and be recognized, and Hampton did. Unknown to the councilman, the mayor intended to call each member's name so they could be acknowledged. So Hampton's response was premature.

"No, not yet, Hoke," Rainwater said to a chorus of laughter.

Without question, the comments and ensuing laughter were embarrassing for Councilman Hampton. So, too, they were embarrassing for others of his race. In retrospect, the intent of Rainwater's comments was not to be hurtful. Anyone who knows the mayor will decry any accusation that he intentionally would make racist remarks. His words, however, are an example of how comments can impact others. It is why residents of every diverse community must become more sensitive to the implication of their words.

It is wrong in the case of Zoeller and Rainwater to assume their remarks were intentional. It is equally wrong to pretend words have no power.