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Slayings push east-side Detroiters to act

Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News

Detroit -- A group of east-side residents upset about several homicides over the past 12 months went door-to-door today passing out fliers with safety tips.

The City Airport Renaissance Association estimates bodies of eight slain women have been found over the past year in an area bounded by Van Dyke, Gratiot, Harper and Grinnell.

"We want everybody in our area aware of the murders," association spokeswoman Joyce Johnson said. "It's pretty nerve-racking."

Advertisement Joyce said the association is not criticizing the efforts of Detroit police. It is trying to keep the community informed and encouraging residents to work with investigators to solve the crimes.

"It isn't that the Police Department isn't doing a fantastic job," she said. "They need extra help."

According to preliminary FBI numbers released in May, the number of homicides in Detroit in 2009 rose to 361 from 323 in 2008, up 11.8 percent.

Detroit Police 2nd Deputy Chief John Roach said homicide investigators have been following the slayings in the east-side neighborhood closely and do not think a serial killer is on the loose.

"At this point, there is no evidence to suggest that these homicides were committed by the same perpetrators," Roach said. "In fact, the evidence suggests the opposite -- that they were committed by different suspects."

Police did not dispute that there had been several slayings in the neighborhood in the past year but did not consider the area a hotspot.

Former state Rep. Mary Waters, who is running for the Michigan Senate, said today she has requested the FBI get involved in investigating the slayings related to the association's efforts.

"The Detroit Police Department is strapped for cash," Waters said. "I want the feds to step in."

Before today's events, Waters had raised the possibility that the slayings were committed by one person targeting women. But during today's press conference, she backed off that assertion.

A group of area residents who ride customized bicycles helped pass out fliers today after hearing about the killings.

The East Side Riders said helping out is the only way to make a difference in crime.

"We need it," said David Jarrell, a 47-year-old Detroit. "It's a good idea."

Police Chief Warren Evans has repeatedly said that the community's help is needed to stem crime in the city.

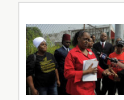
Roach today applauded the association's willingness to distribute the safety tips.

"Any time the community engages constructively to help police, it is nothing but a good thing," Roach said.

"We are appreciative of the fact the neighbors are trying to look out for one another."



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Staying safe tips

- ▶ Avoid walking alone.
 - ▶ Walk in well-lit areas.
 - ▶ Pay attention to your surroundings.
 - ▶ If a driver asks for directions, avoid getting near the vehicle.
 - ▶ Carry a whistle.
 - ▶ Scream or attract attention if in trouble.
 - ▶ Remember, it is hard to hear trouble coming if you are talking on the phone or listening to music.
- Source: *Crime Stoppers and the East District Neighborhood City Hall*

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