

COKE ZERO 400 WIN

After just missing out at Daytona in February, David Ragan drives into Victory Lane on Saturday.

SPORTS,
1C



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\$1.50

SOAK UP THE SYMPHONY

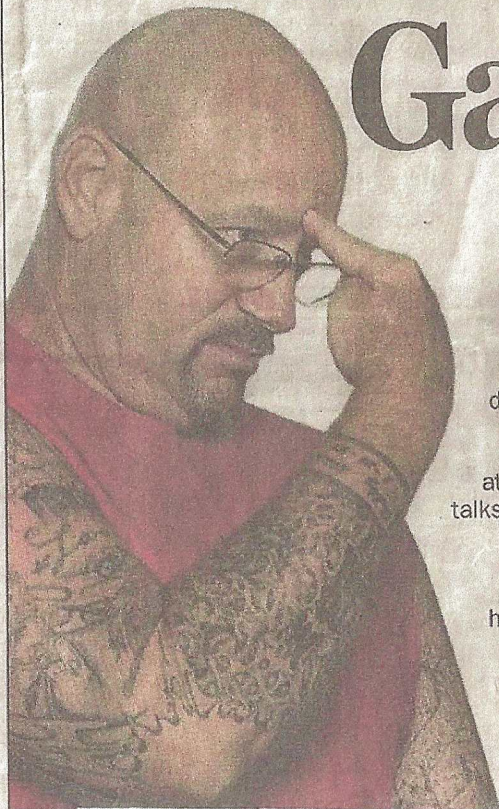


Brevard conductor, orchestra ask you to plunge into the unexpected.

LIFE 1D

Gangs in Brevard

Groups get younger and more violent



Scared straight.

Lawrence Lawton, an ex-con who has developed a program targeted to at-risk youth, talks to a group of youthful offenders about the harsh reality of prison life.

BY JOHNA TORRES
FLORIDA TODAY

Twenty-six-year-old Michelle Gill lay slumped in the corner of her closet, six bullets putting an end to her life and that of her unborn daughter.

A few feet away, Gill's 475-pound boyfriend, Kelvis Smith, a rapper and cocaine dealer, crawled to the phone, swiping at the blood streaming down into his eyes from two bullet wounds. "Big K," as he was known on the street, managed to dial 9-1-1.

Palm Bay detectives said the 2002 execution-style attacks resulted from an incident two months earlier in which 20-year-old Jermaine Belamy and Willie Nowell were shot.

They refused to cooperate with police, choosing instead to inflict their own brand of street justice after their injuries healed.

At the time, no law enforcement agency in Brevard County would use the word "gang" to describe what appeared to be a lethal skirmish between violent rival gangs, the Booker Heights Posse and Cold Side.

But almost a decade after the back-and-forth shootings in 2002, law enforcement agencies openly

GRAPHIC, 2A

Violence in Brevard

Map details crime scenes related to gang activity on the Space Coast.

discuss the 52 gangs operating on the Space Coast.

More frightening than the numbers of gangs, sometimes called "cliques" on the streets, law enforcement officials say, is that the bands of thugs once only in poor neighborhoods are spreading and attracting younger and more diverse members. They also are becoming more violent.

"They start out in junior high school," said Lt. James Dodson, who has worked at the county jail for 24 years. "By the time they are in high school, they are way up in the chain of command for their gang. The young ones are the most easily
See GANGS, 2A

Answers?

Larry Lawton, a convicted felon who runs the Reality Check Anti-gang program, works with kids 11 and older, many of whom are referred by Brevard County judges.

Lawton said it's frightening that many today glorify prison, saying television and music add to a fantasy. He tries debunking myths by detailing his three years in solitary confinement, including being urinated on by guards.

"I don't sugarcoat it, so they don't go in there thinking this is a cool place to be," he said. "Kids know the differences between right and wrong, but do they know the consequences?"