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Fifth Ward Parade Opens Anti-Drug Drive

Staff

Drug dealers running amuck in the Fifth Ward are terrorizing the citizens, but the citizens are fighting back with an organized anti-drug campaign, say organizers of the Fifth Ward Concerned Citizens March Against Drugs and Fear.

Ernest McMillan, coordinator of the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, and Elizabeth Terry, director of Hester House, Thursday announced the beginning of a multi-part campaign to turn the tide against drugs.

The campaign begins Saturday with a 1 p.m. parade up Lyons Avenue, from Union Hall to Solo Street and up Solo to Hester House.

McMillan said the march is to gain public support and attention for the anti-drug campaign. The spark which touched off their effort, he said, was the shooting of 14-year-old Olympia Denean Coleman last January.

Although there is some dispute about the circumstances, some witnesses say the boy was shot during a robbery by two men wanting drugs or money. Two adults with long police records have been charged with the slaying.

Terry said the group seeks to promote legislative action for stiffer drug laws and sentences, creation of neighborhood watches, promote positive relations between citizens and the police, increase youth employment and support drug education in schools.

Terry also said that drug smuggling is so out of hand that military action is needed.

"We feel that drugs are the No. 1 threat to national security. They should be attacked just like an invasion," McMillan added.

McMillan said that cocaine use has become far more common than heroin was, even during what he called a drug epidemic 20 years ago. Dope has become the largest employer in the community, he said.

Cocaine users are getting younger and younger, he said, and they are using younger and younger people to deal and make deliveries because children can escape most legal penalties.