

Cincinnati Youth Needs Hip Hop's Help

Written by Westside ID286

Saturday, 25 September 2004 03:22 -

Wherever life takes us, I think we all hold a spot for our hometown in our hearts.

Being born and raised in Cincinnati, the city holds a spot in my thoughts.

The last years have not been good for the residents of Tha 'Nattie'.

Questionable police shootings of young black males, racial profiling and a host of other issues, give Tha Nattie a 'black eye'.

Well maybe that black eye is well deserved.

In the spring of 2001 all the recent past of the city erupted in a social uprising, some call it a riot. But really when people have had enough and no one is listening; that is a call for social change.

In April of 2001 the incident that sparked it all was the police murder of a 19yr. old Black man who ran, because of out standing traffic warrants. Misdemeanors at best, not really punishable by death.

The shooting was the last straw after many other questionable shootings and beatings by city police that ended in a young black males being buried.

Many in the city knew it was coming; many didn't care until it was too late. Citywide curfews had the impact of arresting more young blacks that were guilty of leaving their house. See the Over

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the Rhine part of 'Tha Nattie' does not have 'yards' to play in. They are lucky if they have a stoop to sit on. Hot long nights and if you stepped outside for some air or a breeze, you went to jail for curfew violation.

Now this is hard for some to realize but it was real. Folks being shot with rubber bullets, maced, hit with clubs just because they questioned the killing of a black youth over traffic tickets.

It was then that many leaders in the city knew things had to change. A racial profiling lawsuit was brought against the city and the police dept. ACLU lawyers and Local lawyer and activist Ken Lawson successfully won that case, forcing the CPD to change the way they do business.

One of the local area activist along with others came up with the idea of a Hip Hop Youth Arts Center; a place where inner city youth can learn and experiment in the Hip Hop Culture.

The organization known as C.O.N.T.R.O.L. (Citizens Organizing Neighborhoods to Regain Our Liberation) is opening this center, and they need the hip-hop culture's help.

They want to provide a safe retreat from the streets. A place where the youth thru expression can find alternative ways to violence thru areas of the hip hop culture.

There have been over 75 homicides so far this year in Cincinnati, compared to 50 something at this same time last year. Violence is still growing and we need to try anything we can to save our children. We cannot just sit by and lose a generation to senseless violence in the streets.

I spoke to one of the organizers of this Center to get the correct information on just what is going on with the center and get an update of the status of 'Tha Nattie'. Gavin Leonard is with C.O.N.T.R.O.L. and he made some time for us. We appreciate that.

Robert – Thanks for taking time for this. I know you're busy.

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Gavin – Well, there's definitely a lot going on, but we try to do everything we can to spread the word about the Center.

Robert – How are things progressing with the center?

Gavin – Real well. We just found out we got a grant from the Greater Cincinnati Foundation for \$30,000, which means we can open. We set a open date of January 3rd, 2005, and we'll be open every Monday and Wednesday from 5-10pm from there on. It's great to finally know when we're gonna open and have the money in the bank to make it a reality.

Robert – Many of the problems that caused the uprising in 2001 are still evident in Cincinnati. Under the current climate of the city, do you see success for the center?

Gavin – Definitely. One of the major problems in Cincinnati is that young people don't have anywhere to go, and they don't have creative outlets for their energy. The center provides both of those things, and will also be a great place for youth to talk about the current climate in the city. There are so few places where youth and their ideas are respected, and as a result we don't benefit as much as we could from their outlook. Come to think of it, I think the Center may even have MORE potential because of the current climate than in other places.

Robert - How has the city and police officials responded to your program?

Gavin – The City officials that we have talked to about the idea - a couple City Councilpeople - have been enthusiastic, but we haven't really put it out there too much yet as far as officials goes, including the police.

Robert – Have they offered any resources to help with this project?

Gavin - No resources from the city or police yet. But part of that is our own decision. City money often has a lot of strings attached, and we have other sources of funding that we feel

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more comfortable with.

Robert – Are police issues going to be addressed at the center? I mean like what to do if you're stopped and things like that?

Gavin – Well, CONTROL's first project was Cincinnati Copwatch, where we did direct monitoring of police and citizen interaction. We have a great Know Your Rights pocket guide that I'm sure we'll make available at the Center, and we're not going to shy away from police issues. I mean, young people wanna talk about the police because police affect our lives, so we're gonna try to facilitate a good dialogue about police just like everything else.

Robert – Has the police department dedicated any time to the program?

Gavin – Not to my knowledge.

Robert – Recently I see the Guardian Angels have come to some areas of Tha Nattie. Are they going to be present in the center?

Gavin – We haven't talked with the Guardian Angels at all. And we feel confident we can handle security issues on our own. We are running our center on respect, and have taken input from youth every step along the way. After looking at a whole bunch of other youth based places around the country, we found that if you get young people to have ownership of a place, and then respect them and ask them to respect you, the result will be amazing. Everybody wants us to have cameras and metal detectors and whatever else, but the studies show more restrictions and less respect equals problems.

Robert – Over the Rhine can be a tuff place. What do you have in store for youth in other areas of the city that maybe cannot come to Over the Rhine because of their parents concerns?

Gavin – That's a good question. Right now, we're struggling just to get this center open and

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filled with the best possible resources. But, our long term goal is to see Hip Hop Youth Arts Center's all over the city and to spread across the country as well. But we think Central Parkway and Liberty is a good location in terms of safety and accessibility.

Robert – What can teens look forward to in the way of hip-hop culture from the center?

Gavin – We're gonna do our best to cover as many aspects of hip hop culture as possible. DJing, MCing, breakdancing, graffiti, and hip hop dance are just some of the things we're hoping to provide either when we open or soon after.

Robert – What can the hip-hop community locally and nationally do to help with this programs success?

Gavin – Both locally and nationally, we need the hip hop community to support the Hip Hop Youth Arts Center and places like it financially. The hip hop community has the financial power to get projects like ours off the ground and then running smoothly, and we need people to step up and put their money where their mouth is. We also need volunteers to do everything from show youth how to use production equipment to create a graffiti mural and sweep the floors. Please check out our website at www.natiyouthcenter.org or give us a call at 513.266.1508 to find out how you can get involved.

Robert – Well I feel this is an important and needed program for the youth of Cincinnati.

Is there anything you want to add or something that we haven't covered?

Gavin – No, I think we got just about everything. Thanks for your interest and I'll keep you updated as we get closer to opening.

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Robert – Well we wish you luck, and I hope that the hip-hop community will step up and offer what it can to see that this program is a success. After all the youth are the future of the hip-hop community and they are our future leaders in society. So the best of luck to you and the program and if there is anything I can do, just let me know.

Gavin – I agree completely, the youth are the future. Thanks for your support.

Robert – Thanks again for taking time for me. 1—Peace

Gavin - Peace.