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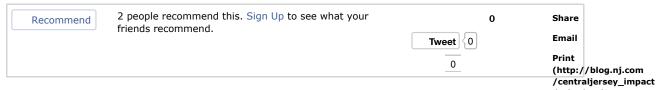
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Trenton picnic's message: Fire grills, not guns

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By Giri Nathan SPECIAL TO THE T(print_html?entry= 72010/08 TRENTON — The city has seen sorrenton_picnics_message_ horrific crimes in recent months, but yesterday at the park it was all hula hoops and face paint and sizzling burgers.

Hundreds of families rallied to "End the Violence," gathering at Cadwalader Park for an old-time cookout. The event was sponsored by Fathers and Men United for a Better Trenton in partnership with the Trenton Police Department.

"We want the kids to see how we used

Mary Iuvone/For the Times Four-year-old Bedees Tweh of Trenton gets a hot dog from Sherman McGilberry, a member of Fathers and Men United for a Better Trenton, during the fourth annual Community Day to End Violence, held at Cadwalader Park Saturday. to do it back in the day," said Wayne Council, co-founder of Fathers and Men United. "We want people to see, this is love."

Aside from providing a safe and fun day of play, the event also prepared children for the upcoming school year. Free bookbags, calculators, pencils and markers were distributed, said Lee Hood, treasurer of the organization.

Council estimated that around 2,000 people would attend the rally, now in its fourth year, to enjoy the barbecue, live music, sack races and a basketball tournament.

"We want them shooting the ball, not shooting the guns," Council added.

Council said he has personally seen change in the community since he started the organization.

"There's a stereotype: Every time people get together, there's some shooting or fighting going on. This has been going for four years, and not one incident," he said.

Co-founder Raymond Young said he saw the event as a way to reach back to simpler times and present a place for "kids to be who they are" without worrying about the threat of gangs.

"If we could save just one, we've done our job," said Young. He hoped that kids would see the cookout as a "reward" for hard work in school.

"Some teachers said that because of this event, the school year gets off to a good start," said Jason Rogers, chairperson of Fathers and Men United.

Fathers and Men United also does work outside the annual rally, and it's not limited to younger children. Council said his organization seeks to be a presence in the Trenton community, "visible, not invisible," open to people of all ages and races. In the past, members of the organization have visited prisons and mentored gang members — some of whom dubbed Council "Uncle Count."

The organization operates through love, he said: "These are all our children. How can you be scared of your own children?"

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