

Meeting on gangs draws a crowd

Gangs By JENNIFER SQUIRES

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SANTA CRUZ — Parents questioned police about what color shirts their children should wear and how they could make the act of being a gang member a criminal offense during a community meeting about gang awareness at Santa Cruz High School on Wednesday.

The standing-room-only forum in the school's auditorium was meant to educate parents and students about gangs in the wake of the slaying of Tyler Tenorio, 16, on Friday night.

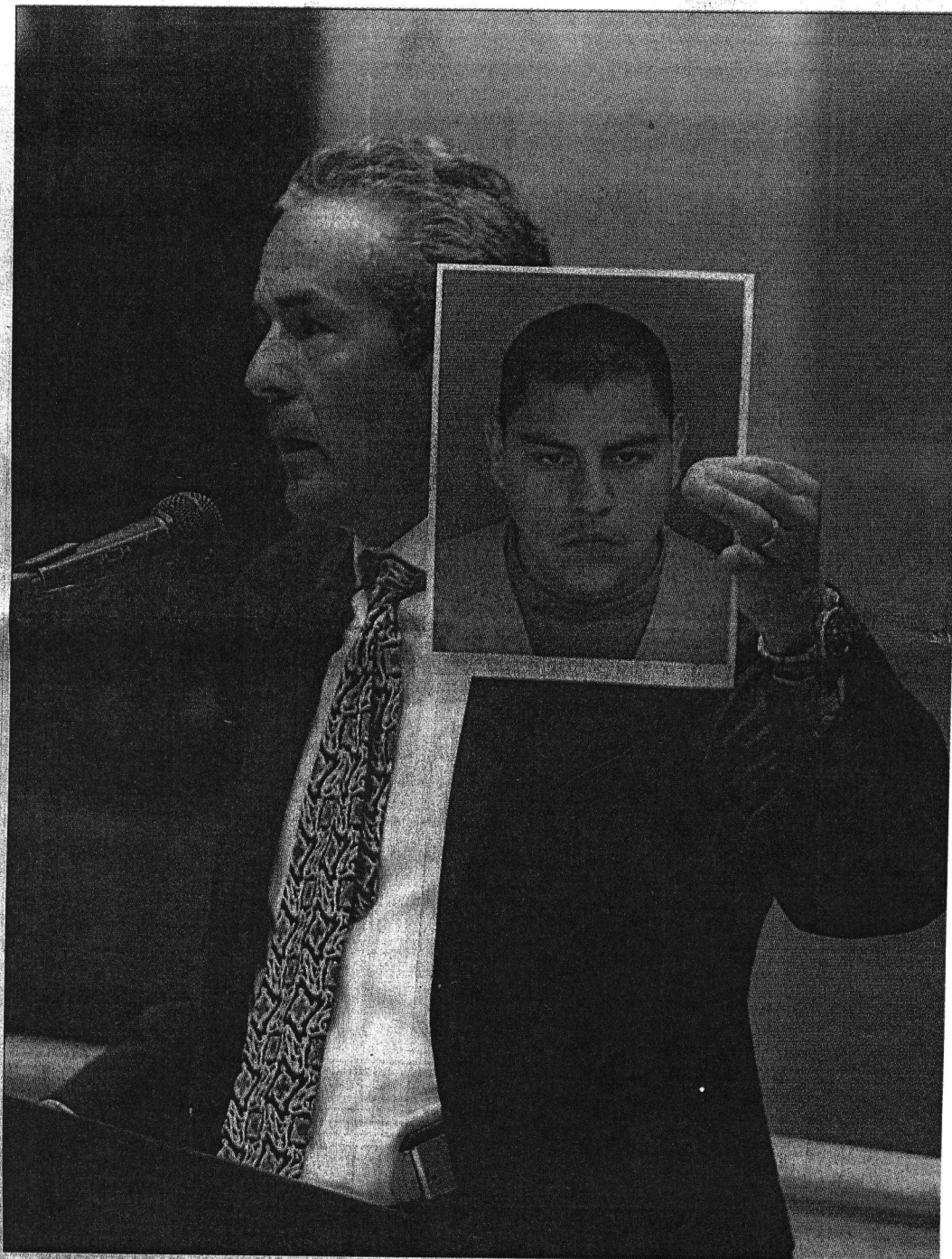
Tenorio, a junior at the school, died two blocks from the police station after he and his friends got into an argument with gang members on Laurel Street.

Tenorio was not a gang member, police said.

Lt. Rudy Escalante called the killing "a tragic loss."

"We should be angry over this incident," he told the crowd of a couple hundred, adding that police won't tolerate violent crime.

But he also said police want to empower people to protect themselves, their children and the community.



PHIL CARTER/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz police Lt. Rudy Escalante holds up the mug shot of murder suspect Daniel Onesto during a community meeting regarding gang violence at Santa Cruz High School on Wednesday night.

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MORE INSIDE: Police ID second suspect; slain teen's friends change story about what led to fatal fight. **B1**

GANG SLOGANS

Police say gang members will yell out these words, typically to stake their claim to an area or as a challenge. They will also 'tag' these words or numbers on fences, sidewalks and walls.

For Surenos, who claim blue:

- Southside
- Sur
- No. 13 (also as 'XIII') and specific gang names

For Nortenos, who claim red:

- Northside
- Nortenos or Northerners
- No. 14 (also as 'XIV') and specific gang names



PHIL CARTER/SENTINEL

Led by Santa Cruz police, a community meeting regarding gang violence was held at Santa Cruz High School on Wednesday night. The meeting comes after the recent killing of a 16-year-old Santa Cruz High student.

GANGS

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When parents pushed for specific ways to help their kids, Escalante agreed with one mother who suggested kids just walk away from challenges.

Gang investigators gave the crowd, which included a lot of high school students, a basic overview of gang colors, names, signs and symbols.

The gang suspected in the slaying of Tenorio claims blue and considers the end of Chestnut Street its territory. The Sentinel is not naming the gang so as not to give it credit.

Gang investigators made a point to add that good, hard-working people also live in the area the gang claims.

The school color at Santa Cruz High is red and many of the students come from the Westside, an area of town also claimed by gang members who identify with the color red and are rivals of the blue group.

But detective Joe Hernandez pointed out that being proud of where you're from, such as the Westside, "does not make you a gang member."

The crowd laughed, but police also emphasized the importance of being aware of what their children are doing, with whom they hang out and what they wear. Police told parents to watch for a dominance of red or blue, and that something as subtle as red shoelaces or a blue belt could be a trigger for a gang member to challenge their children.

"Don't dismiss it as a growing phase," Escalante told parents, talking about their kids' clothing choices.

Police also urged residents to call to report suspicious activity and come forward as witnesses. They said gang members are more afraid of people speaking against them than going to prison.

People asked about gang enhancements — add-ons in the court system that increase prison sentences — and how gangs are moni-



PHIL CARTER/SENTINEL

An audience member takes time to reflect during a community meeting led by Santa Cruz police on Wednesday. The meeting at Santa Cruz High School dealt with gang violence in the community.

tored. Investigators told them there are as many as 300 gang members in the city, divided between about a half-dozen gangs.

The meeting got heated at times.

Alba Mercado, who works with gang members through the Community Restora-

tion Project in Watsonville, stood up and yelled "they're human beings, too."

Many people in the audience shook their heads and

mumbled, "no, they're not."

Outside the forum, Mercado said she came to the event because she cares and hopes people can come together to deal with gangs rather than instilling fear and locking up young people.

"There's two sides to the story, that's the reality of this," she said, noting the two suspects in the slaying also have mothers who are grieving now. "We need to start caring."

Rebecca Trautwein, whose kids attend the high school, said she came to the meeting because she's worried about her children's safety and wanted to learn more about gang issues in the city.

She said she left with a feeling that the people needed to "come together as a united community."

Moms and friends Kristin Hill and Janet Barber have younger children, but they attended the meeting "to have an awareness of what to look for," Hill said.

"It feels like things are getting less and less safe," Barber said.