Northside

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ALL PHOTOS BY ANGELO MURRAY/ KNIGHT LIFE

Choices, located at 766 N. Westnedge, is a clothing store that has been in business for two years. The store sells clothes targeted to youth. The fashion is styled around the hip hop and urban community. Choices customers are regulars who stop by for a simple "hello."

Wing Heaven is a restaurant that serves soul food in an urban neighborhood. Wing Heaven is located at 712 Douglas Ave. The restaurant has been up and running for 2 years. The menu is surely one of a kind serving foods such as chicken, fish and kool-aid.

Douglass Community Center Located at 1000 W. Paterson St. This center is the home of the Powell Branch Library, a basketball association, as well as many other programs for all ages.

The Wall of Recognition at the Douglass Center showcases engravings of distinguished Americans including the Center's namesake, Frederick Douglass.

Parents and Teens are Affected by Gangs

What Parents Can Do

TISHA PANKOP/ GUEST PHOTOGRAPHER

Leo Gray and his mother, Eneke Durden have fun on Loy Norrix's campus. A unique part of their relationship is that they like to kid around with each other and have fun.

Sarah Leip
Business Manager

"I had an older brother, named Leo, which I named my son after. He thought it was good to hustle and at the age of twenty, he was shot seven times, stuffed into a sleeping bag, and thrown in an alley. Me and my family had to go to Detroit and claim the body," explained Eneke Durden.

Durden is the mother of Leo Gray, a junior at Loy Norrix High School who is a key player on the varsity basketball team. Durden does everything possible to keep her children's minds off the "thug life"; she encourages them to participate in sports and is an active part of their lives. Durden knows where her children are and who they are with at all times. If they are somewhere other than where they originally said, she finds out because she talks to other parents.

"There is a really slight chance that they [my children] get away with lying," said Durden.

Durden grew up in Comstock, Michigan but moved to Kalamazoo at age twelve. Durden doesn't want any of her children to get involved in gangs; she wants better for her kids, which is why she plays such an active role of their lives. Durden makes sure that her children are involved in sports all year round and she is her children's most avid cheerleader.

Durden wants her children to look back and see how much of a positive influence she has had by keeping them out of gangs. Durden wants her kids to go to college, get a job, and make money, but she wants them to do more than just make lots of money.

"You can't take that money to the grave with you; make a name for yourself," Durden advises her children.

> The traditional role of the parent is to be there to take care of their children, ensure that they have a place to sleep at night, and to be an overall good role model.

Many teens are categorized by society as either good or bad. The grades they get in school and the people they hang out with are a major factor in the way society looks at a person. It also makes Durden sad to see girls that are pregnant in their teen years, especially by males that are not going to be an active part of their child's life.

The traditional role of the parent is to be there to take care of their children, ensure that they have a place to sleep at night, and to be an overall good role model. Many parents take this responsibility seriously, but others do not. Some parents let their kids roam the streets but some parents have to work several jobs to support their children and, consequently, aren't physically there to control their children.

Melinda Vega, junior at LN, has a problem with her family constantly fighting because her cousins are in two different gangs in Texas. Her family has a hard time getting together. Even though they personally don't fight it is that they are involved in different gangs.

"It [gang violence] is not as bad in Kalamazoo. I have seen worse. In Texas you can't wear a certain color. If you go a few blocks one way and if you go the other way, you can't wear one color," said Vega.

Vega doesn't want to end up like the people she knows who have been affected by the gangs. Her cousin told her not to get involved with the gang life. When Vega's brother got involved in a gang, he started getting in trouble and went to jail.

"He always tells me not to get involved. 'You will regret it. The only way out is in a coffin,' [he said] and then he told me if he could do it again, he wouldn't get involved," Vega said.

Senior Anya Dompier wants the violence in the community to stop and for parents to take some of the responsibility for their children's actions. She feels that problems with violence are often their fault for not being an active part of their kids' lives.

"All of it starts in the household, how you live, how you were raised; if the parents were actually being parents and maybe if the kids weren't around those people doing drugs and being in gangs, they would do better," said Dompier.

Life in the Family

An Inside Look at Gang Relationships

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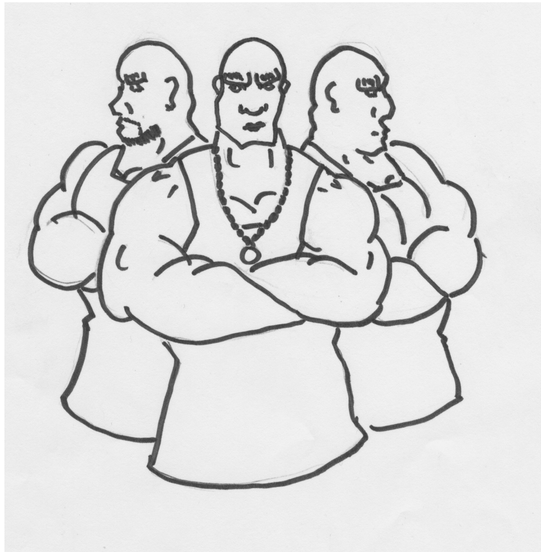

MATEO HERNANDEZ/ KNIGHT LIFE

Generally humans belong to a family group that provides them with love and support, but what if someone does not have a supporting family and their friends are all they can count on? The constant drive to feel love and a sense of belonging will push the human mind to take up any role, and for some teens in Kalamazoo that role is a gang member.

"If they can't find love at home and they feel like they can get love from Northside or Southside gangs, that's where they get it from," said senior Marla Bowser.

Senior Darrell Hobson says that the term "gang" is not the right word to describe the factions that have sprung up on both sides of Kalamazoo.

"We consider ourselves family," said Hobson.

The first gangs started to spring up on the east coast as early as 1850 due to the flood of immigrants into the United States. Like the Kalamazoo gangs, these gangs also often referred to themselves as "family." The groups or "families" in Kalamazoo are made up of friends who have been together for years. They grow up with each other and in most cases in the same neighborhood. Senior Louis Rolland says that that is where the factor of neighborhood ends when it comes to forming gangs.

"Some people from the Southside [are] cool, just like some people from the Northside [are] cool," said Rolland.

Being a gang member is not about what side of Kalamazoo you live on, it is about the friends you grew up with. Gangs in Kalamazoo start with a group of friends and spread from there.

The groups of friends that form in various neighborhoods usually take names to identify themselves. Some of the earliest American gang names include The Bummers Gang, The McCanles Gang and The James Street Gang of which Al Capone was a member of. These names contribute to the feeling of being a family. Your family name might be Smith. The only reason for that is because your forefather created that name as their own. The family grew and generations followed and that became the official name. This official name is so people can better associate you and so you can become different from the Jacksons down the street. After a while a "family" of friends will assume that same thing; they will create a name to separate themselves from others and to create a sense of companionship.

Over the years in Kalamazoo, being part of a "family" outside of the biological family has become more common among young people, and as more people become involved in these groups, it only provokes the idea of a hierarchy within these groups so that they can operate.

Many factors contribute to the possible reason why some of the gangs in Kalamazoo that are made up of teens and young adults become violent. Collected data from 2007 suggests that children neglected by their parents are more likely to commit crimes later on in life. Children that are abused or neglected have a 53% chance of arrest as a juvenile.

"I know there are parents who don't care where their child is going or what they are doing," said Junior Ashley Davis.

Others disagree, saying that the existence of gangs is not a problem caused by the parents, it's about the environment or the type of neighborhood that you grow up in.

Senior Deziree Whitley believes that even though the environment might play a role in determining whether or not someone would join a gang, it is not always the deciding factor.

"Your environment doesn't always make you, but it can make you if you put yourselves in that environment. You pick where you want to be at any moment," said Whitley.

Gangs throughout history have been known for resorting to illegal activities to make money. The drive to make money is part of the reason for the gang violence in Kalamazoo. Some say its not about not having a replacing a neglectful family, its about having to take care of that biological family.

"Sometimes they [gang members] choose to 'hustle' because they are literally forced to take care of their entire family," said Davis.

For whatever reason gangs exist, whether it be family replacement or a means of making money, the results of gang violence are always the same; people get hurt. In Kalamazoo five teens have already died in 2007 as a result of teen violence and some say that its never going to end.

"It ain't never gonna stop," said Rolland. It is agreed among most students though that the choice whether or not to be in a gang is a personal one.

"The people who get out [of the hood] decided to do something better with their lives-they wanted something different," said Bowser.

Southside

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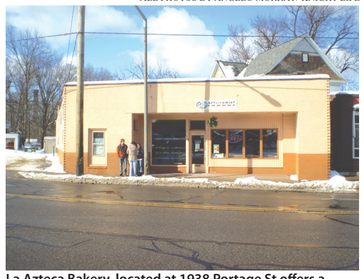

La Azteca Bakery, located at 1938 Portage St offers a large assortment of baked goods, from cookies to cakes and more. Employee Nora Enriquez says that she enjoys working at the bakery because of the location. At the current location, many of the surrounding business owners and residents speak Spanish.

La Mexicana Market, Located at 1956 Portage St. is an authentic Mexican market, complete with a Mexican bakery. The bright outside walls are splashed with murals representing several different ethnicities and countries.

Kik Pool/Boundless playground, located at 1038 Walter St. This pool is open six days a week, early June through mid-August. Open swim is from 12:15-1:15 Monday through Saturday and 5:15-6:15 Monday through Friday. The pool is also host to many swim clubs and lessons throughout the week. The boundless playground was financed by the Junior League of Kalamazoo, and is accessible for children of all disabilities.

Gangs in America

1840
Gangs begin to show signs of life in Philidelphia.

1870
Philidelphia reported having over 100 gangs.

1900's
Italian mafia begins, and reigns throughout the 1900's.

1919
The famous gangster Al Capone moves to Chicago.

1941-1945
Half a million Puerto Ricans arrive in the USA, most settled in NY which led to new gangs.

Late 1960's
Crips became very powerful. Rival "Bloods" gangs formed to challenge strength of Crips.

2000
Gang membership up to one million. "Bloods" most violent gang on East coast.

1840 | 1860 | 1880 | 1900 | 1920 | 1940 | 1960 | 1980

1855-1860
Bummers Gang originated in the west side of Denver, Colorado.

1872-1879
Jessie Evans Gang aka "the boys" reign supreme in New Mexico.

1890
Five point gang (the gang that Al Capone later joins) comes into existence.

1933
Large gang "Bloods" forms in the New York city jail system.

1940's
Mexican gangs form along the coast of the United States.

1980-1990's
Drug networks in full swing. USA number one drug consumer of world. Street gangs change to drug gangs with operations being carried out in a buisness-like manner.