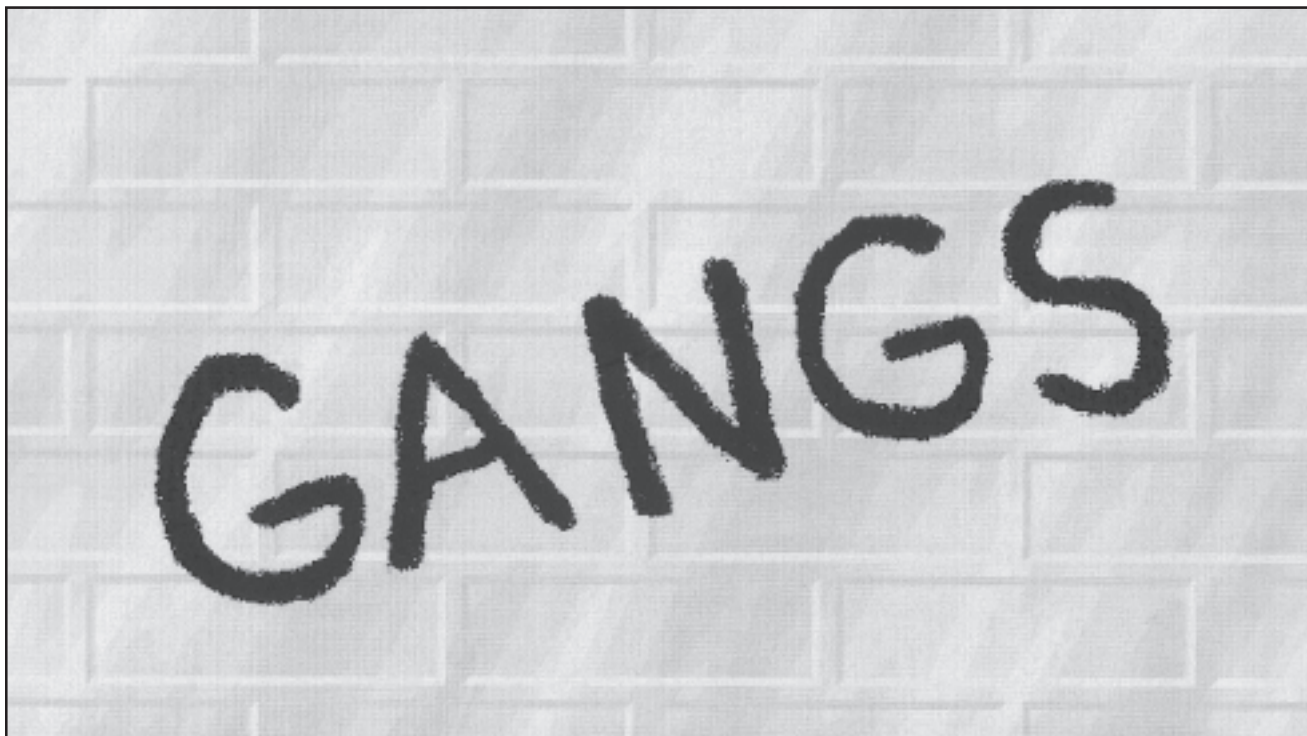


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# ***Safe Streets Task Force Cooperation Gets Results***

By DAVID M. ALLENDER



**“W**orking together works” represents a favorite adage of an Indianapolis, Indiana, community leader<sup>1</sup> in the city’s federally funded Weed and Seed<sup>2</sup> effort. In the spirit of the statement, many agencies with a wide spectrum of responsibilities have cooperated to successfully renovate several inner-city neighborhoods. One partnership strengthened by interacting as members of Weed and Seed is the Safe Streets Task Force. Formed by the FBI in 1992 to combat gangs and violence, the initiative,

comprised of state and local law enforcement officers and FBI agents, operates in many cities throughout the United States.<sup>3</sup>

The investigation into a violent criminal street gang known as the New Breed illustrates how the cooperative efforts of the Safe Streets Task Force concept can get results. Operating in such cities as Indianapolis, Chicago, Atlanta, Louisville, and Cincinnati, the gang was involved in a wide range of criminal activity.<sup>4</sup> Task force officers in Indianapolis opened their case in mid-1997. Safe Streets units taking an

active part in the case included the FBI Indianapolis office and the Metro Gang Task Force (MGTF), comprised of Indianapolis Police Department (IPD) officers.

## **Gang History and Rules**

The New Breed gang started within the confines of the Illinois prison system. To illustrate contempt for the existing gang subculture, the founder of New Breed reportedly encouraged members to violate many conventions of the gang world. Leaders indoctrinated gang members in the belief that the



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income derived from criminal activity constituted the main purpose for the organization. The largest source of profit for the gang came from the illegal distribution of narcotics, most notably heroin.

To promote fidelity to the gang, as well as establish a foundation for order and control, leaders borrowed from the rules and guidelines established by the Black Gangster Nation (BGN) gang. Task force officers recovered copies of the gang’s rules and history or “bible” from the trunk of the local leader’s vehicle. The document instructed adherents to commit to the three “Ls” of Love, Life, and Loyalty. A code of conduct set out a number of rules to live by, such as restricting gang members from incurring financial debts they could not repay in a timely manner. The history identified the “Don” as the ultimate authority figure in all matters, traced the basis for his power back to the time of Hannibal, and identified Hannibal’s “first born son, by a Sicilian woman” as the original leader of the

order. The story then rambled, but left the reader with the impression that the gang had functioned in an unbroken line for over 1,000 years. The closing gave gang members strong suggestions on how to live successful and productive lives.

The gang document had a more ominous side, however, when it entered the realm of discipline. All members of the organization had to sign an 11-point oath of allegiance to the New Breed. For example, one rule stated, “We don’t lie, steal or cheat among us. Our word is our bond. We die for that....”<sup>5</sup> Punishment for any transgression was “unforgivable, penalty is FINAL.” Task force officers discovered during the investigation what the “FINAL” judgment entailed and how strongly individual New Breed members believed in their code.

The paperwork gave investigators valuable insight into the mindset of the New Breed. They had pondered why a group of African-American gang leaders preferred nicknames, such as Velle, Vino,

Frank Nitti, Gotti, and Capone. Detectives discovered the answer when they read that the gang traced its lineage back to Sicily. In addition, the writings spelled out the rank and authority of the Don. This tidbit of information, when added to other facts, enabled detectives to determine that Vino was in charge of the local operation and enjoyed considerable power and authority. Also, the law section of the gang’s document revealed the motive for some of the violence investigators encountered. All in all, the document helped provide a focus for how to attack the organization.

### **Preliminary Steps**

In order to establish an identity in Indianapolis, New Breed gang members engaged in activities that would lead to a citation for a traffic infraction or a custodial misdemeanor arrest. When taken into custody, the suspects presented an Indiana drivers license as identification. When officers checked the authenticity of the license, they would discover that the information supplied was accurate and the license valid. Task force detectives subsequently determined that the name listed on the license presented by a New Breed member often would be an alias. The detectives found that some Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) personnel were issuing fraudulent driving licenses. The detectives worked with the Chicago Police Department (CPD) and the FBI’s Chicago office to establish the real identity of several gang members. CPD examiners compared fingerprints of persons arrested in Indianapolis with prints they had on

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file. Detectives from Chicago assisted by viewing photographs and providing print examiners with names of possible suspects to shorten the process. Because of this effort, officers discovered that a number of persons had arrest warrants, including one for murder, on file in Chicago and apprehended these individuals. Officers also alerted BMV to the problem. BMV used internal audit and control methods to halt the issuance of the bogus licenses and terminated those employees involved.

Next, information surfaced linking the gang to the illegal “cloning” of cellular telephones. Cloning serves a dual purpose for criminals. They can avoid the monthly charge, and law enforcement cannot obtain an account history or accurately trace an account holder. Tracing the account holder represents a necessary step prior to conducting electronic surveillance. A uniformed officer from IPD’s North District made a traffic stop and a custodial arrest for a traffic offense, which led to police interdiction of the cloning operation. The officer contacted the task force detectives with information uncovered during the traffic case. The detectives obtained a search warrant based on the officer’s information and their own interview with the traffic offender. The detectives received technical assistance from cellular telephone representatives while preparing and executing the search warrant. They located and recovered cellular phones and equipment valued at approximately \$100,000. The removal of this illegal source of communication proved invaluable later in the investigation.

To develop the drug dealing case against the gang, task force detectives worked with Indianapolis FBI agents. Cooperating individuals provided information and made controlled purchases of heroin at the direction of police. Together, investigators gathered enough intelligence to introduce an undercover officer to New Breed members for the purpose of purchasing heroin. Task force plainclothes units provided backup for the undercover officer, engaged in a limited number of proactive stops, assisted one another with surveillance on gang members, and gathered intelligence on narcotics trafficking locations. A cooperating individual supplied the

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task force with a cellular telephone number used by gang members to arrange transactions involving the wholesale purchases and later the street-level sale of heroin. As a result of the earlier seizure of cloning equipment, the gang had to legally obtain the phone, which had an identifiable account holder. Electronic communications became increasingly important to New Breed as the gang attempted to shield their operation from pressure

applied by IPD uniformed officers to trafficking locations.

### **Efforts Intensify**

As the case evolved, task force officers employed several surveillance techniques, especially a federal communications wiretap order on the main cellular telephone used by the New Breed. Prior to applying for the wiretap authorization order, detectives checked with the telephone service provider to determine the amount of traffic on the gang’s cellular telephone account. In 4 months, the account registered over 35,000 calls. The tap lasted 75 days and required constant monitoring of the telephone and the conversations. MGTf members, FBI agents from several field offices, Indianapolis West District Neighborhood Resource Officers, and the IPD’s narcotics unit combined to cover the wiretap. The majority of officers who assisted in monitoring the wiretap continued to work on unrelated matters while the electronic surveillance was in place. Undercover controlled transactions continued while the wiretap was in operation. The intense efforts lasted 5 months, including the 75 days of electronic surveillance.

In planning for the wiretap, task force administrators realized that the operation not only would prove labor intensive, but require careful adherence to legal issues as well. Before the electronic surveillance could start, all officers scheduled to monitor the phone received specialized training on how to properly capture conversations. Federal guidelines respect some conversations, even among criminals, as private. For this reason, the officers

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had to listen carefully to what the suspects said. If it became readily apparent that the subject matter fell within one of the protected categories, the officers had to stop the recording and cease monitoring. The law, however, allows for periodic checks to determine when the private conversation ends and the suspects return to illegal activity.

### **Gang Violence**

During the course of the New Breed investigation, the real danger to society from this type of gang became evident in the number and type of criminal acts it committed in addition to drug dealing. One evening, while monitoring conversations on the wiretap, officers overheard the leader of the Indianapolis faction, Vino, complain of being robbed. Talk indicated that an armed robbery involving stolen cash had occurred earlier that day. Vino suspected a gang member known as Sonny and ordered several other New Breed gang members to locate this individual. Conversations throughout the evening indicated that members searched diligently for the suspect. Officers did not know Sonny's identity, but they understood that the punishment for gang members who broke New Breed rules often allegedly was death. Although task force detectives used all of the means available to them, they failed to identify or locate the threatened gang member. Late in the evening, a monitored call informed Vino that gang members had found the suspect. The caller did not give a location. Subsequent conversations indicated that members had recovered

money belonging to the gang, resolved the matter, and would discipline Sonny. Frustrated task force officers could only wait and wonder what and who would be involved in the gang discipline.

On the next evening, Indianapolis East District uniformed officers received a radio call to investigate a suspicious vehicle on the northeast side of the city. The officers found a male murder victim inside the car. The man had been dead for several hours and was identified as a gang member. As the investigation progressed, task force officers determined that this victim was Sonny.

Investigators also obtained information allegedly identifying three additional New Breed members for involvement in another homicide that occurred on the Indiana

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University-Purdue University at Indianapolis campus. The detectives working the New Breed case believed the death was related to their investigation after learning that they had encountered one of the two shooting victims earlier while investigating the cellular telephone cloning. Working as a team,

investigators from the FBI, the Indiana University Police Department, IPD Homicide, and MGTf pieced together the shooting scenario. Reportedly, New Breed members had agreed to purchase crack cocaine from a nongang member. An argument broke out during the transaction and an exchange of gunfire ensued. One man died, and the surviving victim sustained a .45-caliber gunshot wound to the face. The killers fled, believing both victims to be dead.

Unfortunately, these murders represent much of the violence problem in Indianapolis. A local crime analyst summed up the city's situation by stating, “The largest category of homicides in Indianapolis involve groups of chronic offenders with ties to the drug trade. These groups include formal gangs like the New Breed, as well as less organized neighborhood crews. The common link seems to be drug distribution.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Other Successes**

Cooperative efforts led to solving other cases as investigators met and shared information. Officers seized a stolen car from one New Breed member. Arson units solved a suspicious vehicle fire after task force detectives supplied them with information that a New Breed member, having a domestic dispute with his girlfriend, intentionally set the vehicle on fire, which also resulted in the destruction of an innocent neighbor's vehicle. Task force officers arrested numerous individuals on outstanding warrants as they routinely checked known gang members and their associates for

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new charges filed by other officers neither involved in nor knowledgeable about the gang investigation. Task force detectives estimated that in excess of 45 tangential arrests resulted from the main investigation.

### Challenges

Situations arose throughout the case that proved challenging for the investigators. For example, officers learned that incarcerated New Breed members were holding meetings among themselves inside the county jail. When questioned, several of those who had cooperated with police confirmed this information. The underlying theme of the meetings dealt with the need to maintain a united front against law enforcement. Those not inclined to follow this dictate were threatened with serious bodily harm or death. Investigators faced the possibility that investigative leads would disappear and lengthy trials ensue. The officers suspected corruption within the jail system and quickly scheduled a meeting with jail administrators.

Working together, detectives and jail personnel found and corrected the problem. Following normal procedures, jail personnel dispersed gang members throughout the jail population. However, a high-ranking New Breed lieutenant wished to maintain control over the members. He studied the jail system and found a flaw. In order to see medical personnel on a nonemergency basis, an inmate filled out a request form and turned it in to the appropriate authority who forwarded it to a central unit.

Employees at this central location then scheduled groups of inmates to see the doctor. They assigned inmates to a group based on when they received the request forms at the central unit. The gang's lieutenant learned that if he filled out request forms for himself and the person he wished to see, then submitted them at the same time, the forms would arrive at the medical unit together. No corruption was involved, just an ingenious inmate. To avoid future problems, inmates no longer fill out medical requests for others. As an additional precaution, jail personnel moved New Breed members throughout the correctional system, placing some in other counties.

### Conclusion

The investigation of the New Breed gang in Indianapolis, Indiana, was successful. Officers

working together made numerous felony arrests for a wide range of offenses. However, this success resulted from many long hours logged by all of the officers involved. The wiretap exercise alone required approximately 3,600 hours worked by officers engaged in monitoring the traffic. This total does not take into account the time spent by officers reviewing and transcribing the tapes. Surveillance, controlled narcotic buys, preparation and execution of search warrants, and the completion of the paperwork required by the case took many thousands of additional hours.

Moreover, the amount of success achieved in this operation was in direct proportion to the amount of cooperation between the various agencies. The Safe Streets Task Force concept made this cooperation possible. The lead investigators had an existing working



relationship due to past interaction on the task force. Resources and expertise available to the FBI enabled an in-depth investigation of the targets. FBI electronic surveillance equipment enhanced the ability of investigators to penetrate the inner workings of this criminal enterprise. Local officers shared their knowledge of suspects' identities, habits, and methods of operation that proved invaluable to detectives. Combined staffing resources enabled the task force to devote personnel to the investigation without causing any agency to

neglect other duties. In all, skillful blending of resources enabled law enforcement to remove a large number of violent criminal street gang members from the Indianapolis area. ♦

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Olgen Williams directs a local community center and has spearheaded Weed and Seed efforts in Indianapolis since their inception.

<sup>2</sup> Since 1991, Operation Weed and Seed has attempted to control violent crime, drug trafficking, and drug-related crime and to provide a safe environment for residents to live, work, and raise their families. The program

strategically links concentrated and enhanced law enforcement efforts (weeding) with health and human services (seeding) to prevent and deter further crime.


<sup>3</sup> For additional information on Safe Streets, see Douglas Shur, "Safe Streets: Combining Resources to Address Violent Crime," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, April 1995, 1-8.

<sup>4</sup> Investigation indicates that the gang may have operated in as many as 12 cities in 8 states.

<sup>5</sup> This text was printed in italics in original document.

<sup>6</sup> Ed McGarrell is a faculty member at Indiana University and directs the Crime Center at the Hudson Institute.

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