



Mike Mathers/News-Miner

HELP APPRECIATED—Fairbanks Police Lt. James Welch emphasizes the importance of community involvement in assisting the police during a discussion on violence Thursday.

Killing prompts calls for action

By JOLIE LEWIS
Staff Writer

Fairbanks community leaders, responding to the weekend beating death of 15-year-old John Hartman, united Thursday against "senseless" violence.

Individuals attending a community gathering called for more funding and force for the police departments, a stricter curfew ordinance, more community participation in volunteer policing efforts and a review of all levels of the criminal justice system.

"This tragic act of violence is unacceptable. ... I'm not satisfied to live in a community where someone cannot walk down the street without getting assaulted or killed," said borough Mayor Jim Sampson in the opening remarks of an afternoon meeting attended by about 50 people.

Hartman died in the hospital Sunday

after he was kicked in the head repeatedly and sexually assaulted early Saturday. George Frese, 20; Kevin Pease, 18; Marvin Roberts, 19; and Eugene Vent, 17, were indicted on murder charges Thursday.

John Regitano, executive director of the Fairbanks Native Association, said the killing was a tragedy that has touched everybody in the area. He presented a community pledge signed by 75 agencies promising to "redouble our efforts to cooperate, educate and lead our community in efforts that will make the (borough) a safe and nurturing place to raise our families."

Regitano, in a plea for action, said Fairbanks must first admit it has a violence problem. "We need to not just let this be another murder ... If that sort of an incident occurs, then we have too

See FORUM, Page A-8

FORUM: Violence

Continued from Page A-1

much violence. I don't need to look at statistics."

Attending the meeting were the borough, Fairbanks and North Pole mayors, the school district superintendent, lead officers from the Alaska State Troopers and Fairbanks police, school officials and administrators, employees from the state Division of Family and Youth Services, labor union leaders and many others.

Sampson said that as the population of Alaska grew by 114,000 between 1983 and 1996, the number of troopers statewide declined by 44 and the number posted in the immediate Fairbanks area dropped by 19.

City Mayor Jim Hayes said that so far in 1997, there have been eight murders, 42 sexual assaults, 300 assaults and more than 300 domestic violence assaults. "Those figures are up from last year, and we're not even through this year."

Even having a cop on every block won't solve the problem if the community doesn't come together and get involved, Hayes said.

Fairbanks Police Lt. James Welch agreed it would take a community effort to slow crime in the city.

"(Police) cannot solve the problems by ourselves. ... Everybody has eyes, everybody can pick up the phone," Welch said. "I'm not asking for people to be

vigilantes. I'm asking for people to get together."

Jada Humphrey, a member of the grass-roots Southside Neighborhood Organization, took the assembled group to task for not confronting violence sooner.

"You're ruining the most beautiful place I have ever been to by being apathetic, lazy, racist, complacent, spineless," she said. "God help you people if something happens to my daughter in this town ... because you've done nothing."

After Humphrey spoke, Shirley Demientieff pledged to attend community policing meetings in the future. She challenged at least five others to do the same. "It's up to us as citizens to get involved."

Demientieff also proposed a candlelight walk Nov. 8 beginning at the Fraternal Order of Eagles Hall, where the four suspects reportedly attended a wedding reception Friday night, and concluding for prayer on the corner of 9th Avenue and Barnette Street, where Hartman's body was found shortly before 3 a.m. Saturday.

Many speakers at the meeting voiced concern and condolences for Hartman's family.

"The number of people that won't tolerate this... is far greater than the number of the perpetrators of these things," Regitano said.