



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

Senator Malcolm A. Smith And Rockaway Community Team-Up for Re-Opening of Redfern Houses Community Center

MALCOLM A. SMITH July 6, 2008

Operation S.N.U.G. Anti-violence Initiative Launches in Far Rockaway Community.

(Far Rockaway, NY)-Senate Democratic Leader Malcolm A. Smith (D-St. Albans) was joined by community leaders and local elected officials to re-open the Redfern Community Center in the aftermath of recent shootings in and near the public housing development.

The facility was one of several centers managed by the City's Housing Authority closed early this year. Residents in the area complained at a community meeting hosted by Smith in May that neighborhood youths had no recreational centers available which may have contributed to a recent surge in crime as the long summer days had arrived.

Smith said that opening the center was just the first step in implementing components of the Operation S.N.U.G., statewide initiative on the Peninsula. Tomorrow, Smith will be joined by Democratic Senate colleagues Antoine Thompson (D-Buffalo) and William Stachowski (D-Buffalo) to kick off Operation S.N.U.G., anti-crime initiatives in Buffalo and Rochester.

"I am extremely please I was able to identify the \$80,000 in funding needed to re-open the Redfern Community Center," said Senator Smith. "This center will keep our children safe and out of harm's way during the summertime. I plan to continue working with my colleagues in government and local organizations to orchestrate a more long-term plan to ensure our youths have recreational options available year-round."

Meetings with city local leaders and law enforcement officials have been held in Far Rockaway and Harlem, to construct a plan to stop violence in the area, leading to the creation of Operation S.N.U.G. (the word 'guns' spelled backwards). Formally known as Operation C.O.M.P.P., emergency meetings were convened following several shooting incidents that occurred during the Memorial Holiday week in Harlem and Far Rockaway, leaving eight individuals wounded and fatally killing Brandon Bethea and Tyreece Johnson. The shootings were separate incidents.

New York City Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly said: "Major crime is down more than 6 percent in Far Rockaway, but the New York City Police Department is not letting up its efforts. Whether we are on patrol in Redfern and elsewhere in the Rockaways, or providing options to young people through our targeted juvenile intervention and basketball mentorship programs, the NYPD continues to actively support the mission of Operation S.N.U.G. The re-opening of the Redfern Community Center is great news for Far Rockaway, and for our partnership with the community, and I congratulate Senator Smith on this accomplishment."

This new initiative consists of:

Street intervention and stopping the violence

- violence interrupters
- support for police and law enforcement

National state local funding support

§ funding for all alternatives

§ legislation that can help implement solutions

Use of celebrities and centers

- public relations and materials
- existing community centers, new bunkers and community offices

Gangs, guns, gainful employment

- real-world gang awareness and prevention initiatives
- connections to employment and economic alternatives

Queens District Attorney Richard Brown said: "My office, working closely with our Police Department partners, State Senator Malcolm A. Smith and other public officials and community leaders, is firmly committed to continuing our focus on the drug and gang-based violence that all too often has plagued the Rockaways. The re-opening of the Redfern Houses Community Center is a positive step in creating an environment that will help reduce the level of violence and improve the quality of life in the neighborhood, making it a safer place in which to live and work."

The random shootings in Harlem, the Rockaways, Jackson Heights, Prospect Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant have led to few arrests and several of the incidents remain under investigation. Law enforcement officials are asking anyone with information leading to an arrest in any of the shootings to call the Crime Stoppers hotline at 800-577- TIPS.

Another outcome from the May meeting held in Far Rockaway included thousands of dollars in funding committed by federal, state, and local representatives to purchase security cameras for the Redfern Housing complex.

Assemblywoman Michele Titus (D-Far Rockaway) said: With the leadership of Senator Smith, this partnership is bringing everyone together and we have begun to see tangible results. This is a step in the right direction. In the upcoming months we look towards installation of security cameras, which will help deter further criminal activities from plaguing the Redfern residents. I remain committed to making sure the residents of Far Rockaway have a safe neighborhood to live in."

Assemblywoman Audrey I. Pheffer said: "I commend Senator Smith for his steadfast commitment to re-opening the Redfern Center. The youth need recreational activities in their communities. I have always recognized the need to bring quality services to Rockaway, which is too often forgotten. Implementing Operation SNUG in Rockaway will hopefully send a message loud and clear that we will not lie down and watch our children and residents get slain and wounded carelessly."

Local community groups have urged elected officials to address the growing violence in the community and to increase efforts to ensure the safety of residents, especially in the public housing developments.

Doris Jacobs, President of the Redfern Tenants Association said: "My board and I would like to thank Senator Malcolm Smith, along with his colleagues and NYCHA, for re-opening our center. I hope the community will come out and support it. As of right now I understand we have a lot of children registered for the days and night camps that will be offered at the Center. I hope the parents support it and let their children attend."

NYCHA Chairman Tino Hernandez said: "Thanks to Minority Leader Smith's allocation we are cutting a ribbon today to re-open Redfern Community Center. The funds will enable NYCHA to operate a summer day camp and an evening program for teens through September. NYCHA remains committed to our residents and we will continue to do everything in our power to preserve the programs and services which help make us what we are today – the #1 housing authority in the country."

Others scheduled to attend today's ribbon cutting ceremony included U.S. Congressman Gregory Meeks (D-Queens), City Councilman James Sanders, Jr.(D-Far Rockaway) and members of the Redfern Tenants Association, Ocean Bay, JCCRP, NAACP-Far Rockaway Branch, Sorrentino Parks and Recreations, Weed and Seed, Operation S.N.U.G., in addition to community residents.

Senator Smith concluded: "It is time we take back what is rightfully ours, the community. Re-opening the Redfern community center is just the beginning and I look forward to joining forces with community residents, elected and law enforcement officials to increase safety and improve the quality of life throughout New York State."