

'Harmony Picnic' Hosted by 84th Precinct At Commodore Barry Park; Safir Attends

By Sara B. Miller
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VINEGAR HILL — When a little old woman was shot and killed by police in Brooklyn 13 years ago, a minister in Crown Heights felt he had a moral obligation to mend what he considered a deteriorating understanding between the police and minority communities.

He went to then-Mayor Edward Koch and brainstormed a plan — to host monthly breakfasts for various precincts and communities throughout Brooklyn North. The successful meetings inspired him to host a "grand finale" at the end of that year, which turned into the all-inclusive "Harmony" picnic, because, he said, "harmony is the way to go."

A simple idea has grown into an annual event for many commands throughout the entire City. What was once a relatively small gathering in Brooklyn North has grown into an annual fanfare, which this year drew New York City Police Commissioner Howard Safir and a throng of news cameras Thursday afternoon.

But the mission of 13 years ago remains the same today — to forge a union between the police department and its community. Brooklyn North's picnic drew almost 4,000 children from the 10 precincts represented — 73rd, 75th, 77th, 79th, 81st, 83rd, 84th, 88th, 90th and 94th.

This year's event was hosted by the 84th Precinct at Commodore Barry Park, and much of the funding comes from Smallwood himself, as well as donations from various Brooklyn corporations, such as Pfizer Inc., Keyspan Energy and Con Edison.

Detective Bill Wansor, a community affairs officer of the 84th Precinct, said the event is one way to teach both groups how to look at one another through different lenses.

On the one hand, it teaches children that cops "don't just roll up when there is trouble," said Wansor. "We are here, we are part of them." On the other hand, it teaches cops that all children are not troublemakers. "Cops get to see kids in a different light," said Smallwood. Instead of calling them "little bastards," he said, they get a chance to know and understand them.

The picnic also introduces children to the various squads within the department, like the Emergency Unit and the Bomb Squad, to give young children a glimpse of what the police officers do "so it isn't scary," said Wansor. A Kings County District Attorney's Office booth distributed pamphlets about crime prevention and safety tips and a recruiting booth handed out drug



A child from Brooklyn North gets an unlucky drenching at the Strategic and Tactical Command Brooklyn North's 13th Annual Harmony Picnic.

education and other information.

But the real highlights, according to the children who were really the guests of honor, were hot dogs, watermelon, Italian ice, carnival rides, a DJ, and balloons, all of which added "a little bit of sugar with the spice," said Wansor.

It is important to bring kids together from different communities, said Wansor, where they can "interact in a fun-filled, controlled environment," he said.

"Any event like this that fosters friendship and understanding between police and the community, particularly small children, is always a worthwhile investment," said Leslie Lewis, president of the Community Council of the 84th Precinct. "It is an investment in our future."

"It's about the police and the community hanging in there together," said Jeannette Gadson, deputy borough president of Brooklyn, who said to a group of children, "Now go have big, safe fun."

Photos by Josh Simons



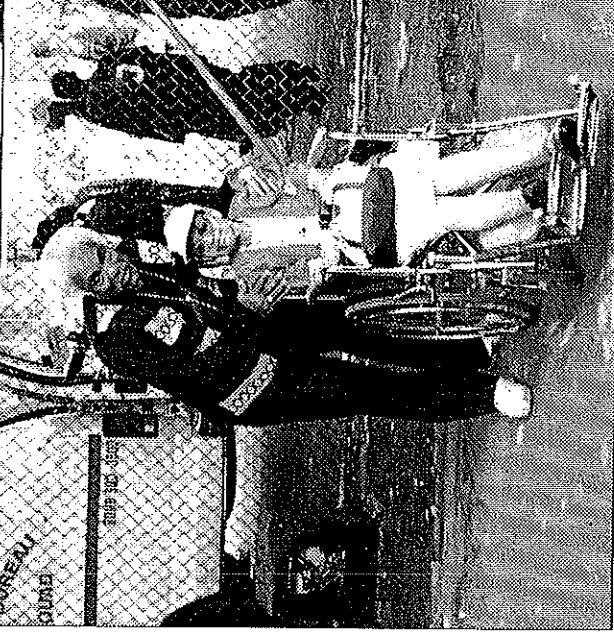
Leslie Lewis, president of the Community Council of the 84th Precinct, stands with commanding officer of the 84th Precinct Roger Peterson. Lewis thanked Rev. Hardy Smallwood, corporate sponsors and various police officers who make the annual Harmony picnic possible.



Community Affairs Officers John Giarratana and Detective Bill Wansor were the main men behind this year's Strategic and Tactical Command Brooklyn North's 13th Annual Harmony Picnic, as the 84th Precinct was this year's host.



(Above) Famous pet McGruff walked around Commodore Barry Park on Thursday afternoon, urging children from Brooklyn North to "take a bite out of crime."



Rev. Hardy Smallwood, founder of the Harmony picnic, stands with his wife Elizabeth at Commodore Barry Park.