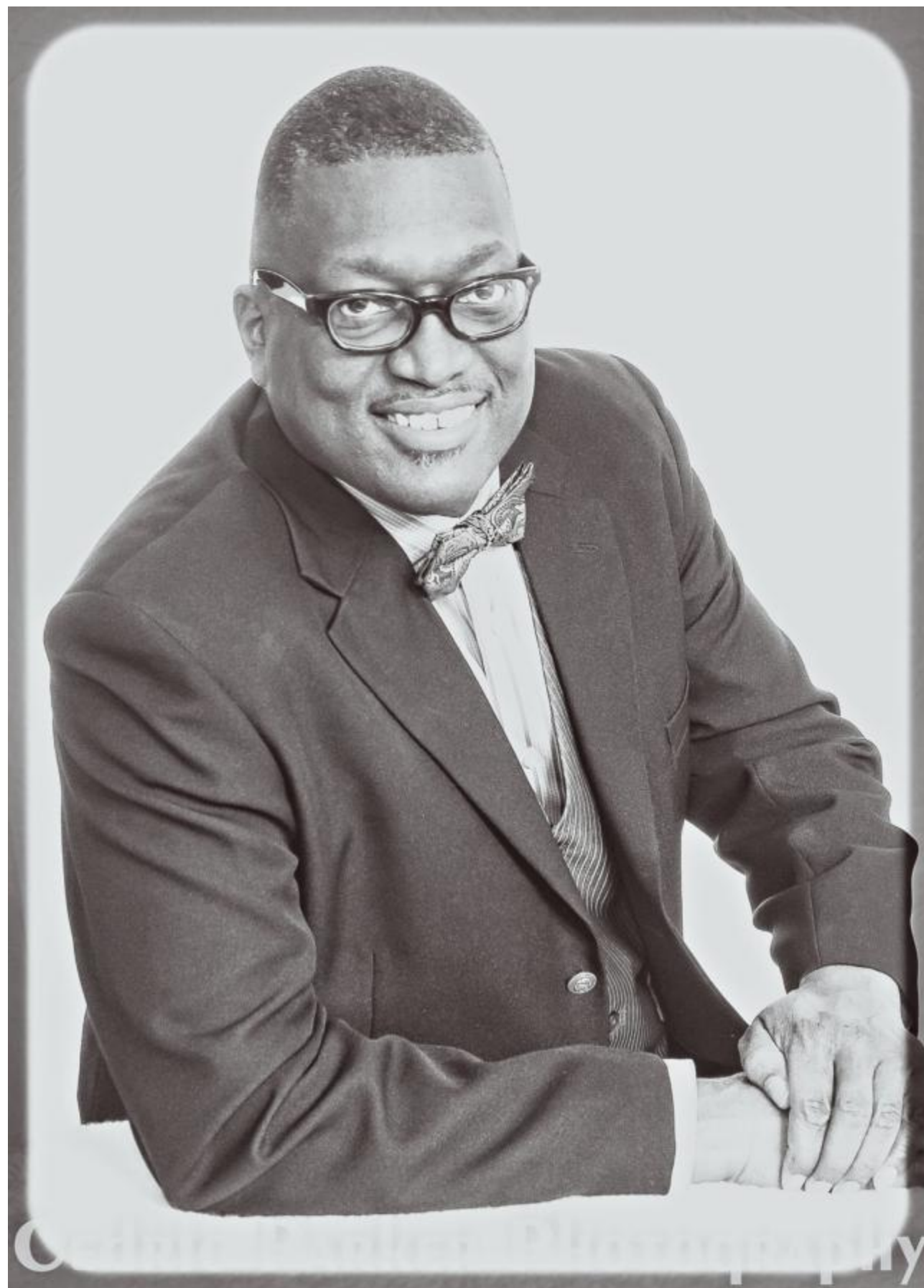




Stop Gun Violence, Virtual Youth Summit Aims To End Youth Violence, Teach Youth Better Ways With Conflict

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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ALTON - Far too often, many young people are using violent means to resolve conflicts and arguments between themselves. More than once, an argument or disagreement has ended in shootings that has also affected innocent bystanders, many times with tragic results for all.

On Thursday, June 25, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., an online Stop Gun Violence Youth Summit meeting, with guest speakers and co-sponsored by ACES 4 Youth and Women of Destiny Movement, will be held with the goal of ending violence and helping young people find peaceful means of resolving conflicts and disagreements.

"In disagreements ending, there is a history of gun violence, but also the shooting of one another to solve differences," said Greg Norris, one of the organizers of the summit.

"So, we're losing the young people, especially the males, but we're also losing innocent bystanders and children who have nothing to do with the shootings. The question is how are they getting these guns? Is it on the black market?"

Norris also mentioned that the legal age to buy both tobacco and alcohol in the state of Illinois is 21, with the legal age to buy tobacco having recently gone up. But there's no age check when purchasing firearms.

"Those are my main points, but how are they getting these guns?," Norris said. "There's been these marketing campaigns geared towards young people, but there's never been a program addressing these guns, and how are they getting them. The goal is to reduce gun violence, and it has to be addressed to not how they're getting the guns, but seeing that they are getting the guns."

Co-organizer Angelia Gower of Venice said another one of the goals of the summit is to teach young people how to resolve conflict and disagreements without having to resort to violence, but rather, through peaceful means.

"One of the things we're trying to teach is conflict resolution," Gower said, "so they won't need to utilize guns to solve their problems. My hope and goal is to teach the young people to advocate against guns and violence to solve problems."

The ultimate goal is to sweep all guns and other firearms off the streets and to teach non-violent methods to resolve conflicts. In the real world, however, that's a far different story.

"i think it's safe to say that's a goal," Gower said. "But in reality, that's not going to happen. So we have to come up with another plan to teach them how to resolve conflict without gun violence."

Norris emphasized the grassroots origins of the summit and movement, and hopes to help implement programs in schools and other institutions.

"We're implementing an initiative to stop violence instead of asking someone else to do it," Norris said. "We would be looking for the same partnerships if we were asking to stop the violence."

In order to do that, the group is looking to collaborate with other organizations that have access to children and young people, and to help start programs that will help reduce violence. Norris again emphasized that the movement is both grassroots and community-oriented, and wants to work with the institutions to help start the programs.

"Once again, we're working without access to the children," Norris said, "and we're going to need their support. We're not trying to do prevention, we're trying to do intervention."

Gower also said that their initiative will also need access to children in order to help make it a successful one.

"In order for us to make it successful, we have to have access to the children," Gower said, "through the school or social, that's one of the main institutions we're targeting for partnership in our collaboration."

Other programs and partnerships may be added on over time, but the main emphasis remains on resolving violence, and one of the side benefits of that would be an educational atmosphere in the local schools that encourages learning. And when the violence is addressed, everything else will safely fall into place.

"They're going to school in the right state of mind," Gower said, "and learning can take place in the right frame of mind."

Norris has already successfully started implementing his programs in Carbondale, and hope to see it also successfully started in the Metro-East area as well.

"We're going to implement the initiative," Norris said, "and we've already implemented it in Carbondale. We really desire to have the right support and cooperation to implement it in Metro-East."

Speakers for the summit include Cedric Parker of Alton, author Creola Davis and youth speaker Raheem Herbert, a high school junior trained advocate. For more information on the summit or to make reservations, please call or text either (618) 409-2237 or (618) 406-1808.

