



December 9, 2011

Rally for youth-led 'Hugs, Not Bullets' campaign against Detroit gun violence Thursday

A group of Detroit youths are gearing up for a yearly campaign to educate the public about the impact of gunfire and gun violence in the city.

The year-round campaign -- "Hugs, Not Guns" -- led by Neighborhood Service Organization's Youth Initiatives Project will officially restart Thursday with a rally at the Spirit of Detroit statue, outside of the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center, Two Woodward Ave. in downtown Detroit.

"We cannot become complacent and accept the issue of gun violence being connected to living in an urban environment," said Frank McGhee, program director of the Youth Initiative Project. "We have to be determined to shed light on this issue and convince the community this is an ongoing process."



Detroit Mayor Dave Bing and law enforcement officials are expected to join more than 50 youths at the 10 a.m. rally.

Dequan O'Neal, a 16-year-old sophomore from Detroit Public Schools' Osborn Evergreen Academy of Design and Alternative Energy, is scheduled to be the

featured student speaker.

McGhee said the message of "Hugs, Not Bullets" is particularly important around this time of year because Detroit is historically known for "celebratory gunfire" on New Year's Eve.

"Some of them spend their time in the basement, some of them are on

the floor and there are those who simply leave the area all together -- their family will take them out of the neighborhood because of the severity of it," he said. "When you fire a gun into the air, that bullet will go up, but at some point it has to come down."

According to the 2009 Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 84 percent of homicide victims who were killed with firearms in 2005 were between the ages of 15 and 19.