

Police arrest 7 middle schoolers in robbery

The boys, ages 13 to 15, thought the victims were members of a rival gang, police say.

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CLEARWATER - On a baseball field outside a Clearwater middle school, police arrested seven boys Thursday and charged them in a gang-related robbery the day before.

The boys, ages 13 to 15, are alleged members of Quince, a local Latin gang.

Police said that after school Wednesday, the boys attacked two other students on the Kennedy Middle School grounds.

The assailants thought the victims were members of Sur 13, a rival Latin gang, police said. One of the victims had a jacket taken from him; the other was struck by a closed pocket knife.

A school resource officer arrived at the fight too late to catch anyone. But on Thursday, one of the victims showed the officer the suspects, who were milling around on the baseball field just off campus.

The seven boys were handcuffed and taken to juvenile detention on robbery charges. An eighth boy, not involved in the robbery, was charged with obstruction of justice for not cooperating in the police investigation.

No one was seriously injured in the fight, police said.

Three of the eight are Kennedy students. The rest attend Largo Middle School.

Over the last few years, Quince and Sur 13 have fought over territory in the Clearwater area, said Aaron Slavin, an assistant state attorney who handles gang prosecutions in Pinellas and Pasco.

"Pretty much every case that we've had involving them has involved a firearm and a shooting," Slavin said. "They tend to be more territorial gangs, more turf gangs than monetary gangs."

Quince, also known as Brown Pride, is a Clearwater-based gang whose members wear brown clothing. The group has been responsible for a lot of graffiti recently, tagging buildings with joker or jester icons, Slavin said.

Sur 13 members wear blue. Their gang, which began in California prisons, has affiliates around the country.

Both gangs have violent initiations, and both are actively involved in recruiting juveniles. But a lot of the crimes linked to them are minor, such as street fights, vandalism and graffiti, Slavin said.

Clearwater police spokeswoman Elizabeth Daly-Watts said gang activity in the city was mostly confined to partying and street-level violence such as fights.

"At this point they have not been linked to any organized criminal activity such as robberies, burglaries or any of that stuff," she said.

Slavin, however, said there have been a number of prosecutions in the last year or so involving one or both of the gangs.

-A Sur 13 member, Francisco Lucero-Ruiz, 29, received 20 years in prison in May, after pleading guilty to aggravated battery and aggravated assault charges. His charges came from a shooting outside a Mexican restaurant in Clearwater in 2005.

-A Quince member, Noe Amrocio-Dono, 21, received a year and a day in prison after pleading no contest for a baseball bat beating in Clearwater. He was committing an auto burglary when the victim confronted him, Slavin said.

-In one case last year, Sur 13 and Quince members fought at a party. The next day, Sur 13 executed a drive-by shooting in retaliation. Oscar Sanchez-Olvera, 20, pleaded no

contest to shooting at, within or into a vehicle. He is in the process of being deported, Slavin said.

He added the gangs recruit kids because juveniles often receive more lenient penalties in the court system. About half the gang prosecutions he's handled have involved juveniles.

But at Kennedy Middle School there have been no gang-related suspensions or disciplinary action this year, said Andrea Zahn, a school district spokeswoman.

Does the school have a gang problem?

"No," said assistant principal Claud Effiom. "We do not."

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