



1999



YOUTH NEIGHBORS

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THINGS TO DO

Steel band loves to play

By Barbara Todd
 News Journal correspondent

Alexandra English makes it look easy when she taps a rubber-headed stick on the metal barrel, but like the other members of the steel drum band Pan D'Monium, she puts a lot of rehearsal time and hard work into her music.

At a recent Picnic in the Park at Plaza Ferdinand in downtown Pensacola, Pan D'Monium

DOWNTOWN played traditional music from Trinidad — where steel bands originated in the 1930s — and performed showtunes and contemporary music as well.

English, 13, who attends Brownsville Academy of Arts and Sciences, plays the six-bass, the lowest of the steel drums (pans), but she hasn't forsaken her other instruments, the piano and the violin.



English

"They're all serious musicians," said Alexandra's mother and band booster, Brenda English, 39. "And they love to perform."

Although these band members have a lot of fun when they perform, they don't take their music lightly and practice two or three times a week.

Sunshine Lewis, 17, is one of the few musicians who doesn't

play other instruments, but then her courses at PJC don't allow her much extra time.

She's taking computer programming, trigonometry, basic psychopathology and Spanish.

"I want to be a systems analyst; psychopathology is just my fun course," she said.

Her brother, John Lewis, 15, who is home-schooled, plays the guitar as well as the steel drums.

Randall Bennett, 14, attends Pensacola Christian Academy and has been playing steel



Lewis



Barabara Todd/News Journal correspondent

The steel drum band Pan D'monium performs in downtown Pensacola.

drums for four years. He was a member of Success, another popular Pensacola steel band, and plays the piano, cello and string bass.

"Playing in the steel band is more lively than playing in a classical ensemble," said Bennett, who hopes to major in music when he goes to college. "You can really get into the music. There's a lot more room for improvisation."

"These kids are very self-directed," said Wendy Bennett,



Bennett

Randall Bennett's mother and the principal of Brownsville Academy. "They love all varieties of music and can play classical, calypso, jazz and blues."

If the crowd at Plaza Ferdinand was any indication, Pan D'Monium appeals to people of all ages. Children danced on the lawn and adults swayed their hips and snapped their fingers as the mellow music floated in the spring breezes.

Martha Struck, 70, and her picnic companion Shirley Meckley, 62, both of Pensacola, sat in lawn chairs under the shade of a oak tree and tapped

PAN D'MONIUM STEEL DRUM BAND

■ To book the band or for more information: Brenda English at 432-9243.

■ Next public performance: 3 p.m. May 2 at Ashmore Fine Arts Auditorium, Pensacola Junior College.

■ Admission: Free.

their toes to the Caribbean music.

"I'm new to Pensacola, and I was delighted to find out that there was a steel band here," Meckley said. "I love it."

SOLUTIONS

Bash will give kids a place for fun

By Ginny Graybiel
News Journal staff writer

Where the crowd gathers, kids will go.

That's the theory behind Summer Bash 1, a Sunday evening extravaganza that's being organized for July 18 at the Cecil B. Hunter Municipal Pool and the surrounding grassy area under Interstate 110.

Summer Bash is first and foremost an effort to provide wholesome activities for young people from 14 to their early 20s, said Eugene Brown, executive director of the Escambia-Pensacola Human Relations Commission, which is helping organize the event.

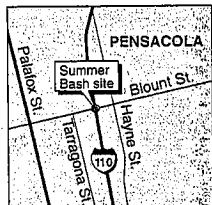
It's also an effort to solve a community problem by providing a Sunday evening alternative for the hundreds of young people who hang out at Wayside Park and the busy Cervantes Street and North Ninth Avenue intersection where several fast-food restaurants are located.

Adults are unhappy because of the traffic gridlock. Kids are unhappy because they feel intimidated by police officers who converge to control the crowds and close off lots when they fill up.

The bash, also sponsored by the city of Pensacola and several youth organizations, will include free swimming and water contests, a stage with a disc jockey, a stage for young people to show off their rap and other talents, a car show with trophies, three-on-three basketball, and free hot dogs, chips and soda as well as vendor food for a price.

"I think it's a great idea," said Lakera Tompkins, 18, a Washington High School graduate heading to Florida A&M University in the fall. "If people start congregating down there, it will evolve into something I

See SUMMER, 3F



Friday, July 9, 1999

Pensacola News Journal

3F

Summer Bash offers kids good alternative

FROM IF

think a lot of kids will end up going to."

James Milton Harris, 17, a rising Washington High senior, said he'll be there. He also hopes the area eventually can be turned into a park, an idea being pushed by the Human Relations Commission and West Florida Chamber of Commerce.

"There's a lot of work that needs to be done down there, like picnic benches and a nice parking lot," he said. "But I think kids will go even now because basically they follow the crowd."

Brown said the area under the interstate is a good alternative for the kids.

"We've heard over the years that the kids say there's no other place for them to go," Brown said. "So we put this together. We want to show them that when they're out of school, they don't have to do things that are going to be disruptive."

Commission staffer Randi Broughton said she hopes Summer Bash 1 can be followed on successive Sundays by Summer Bash 2, 3 and 4.

It depends on whether the young people come. And it also depends on whether organizers can find enough volunteers to supervise the kids, especially because they want to keep police presence to a minimum.

"This is an opportunity for the leaders to not just identify the problems but be a part of the solution," Broughton said. "After all, these are our children. They don't belong to the police department. So we in the community should be there for them."

Brown said he doesn't have a cost estimate and is simply aiming for "as inexpensive as possible."

The Human Relations Commission and several local businesses are pro-

WANT TO GO?

■ **WHAT:** Summer Bash for young people age 14 to early 20s.

■ **WHEN:** 5 to 9 p.m. July 18.

■ **WHERE:** Cecil B. Hunter Municipal Pool and surrounding grassy area under Interstate 110.

■ **DETAILS:** Adults willing to supervise, vendors who want to sell food, and individuals or businesses willing to make contributions should call Randi Broughton at the Escambia-Pensacola Human Relations Commission, 432-8419.

viding the initial money. The city is opening the pool at no charge and providing a stage. Donations also are being sought.

The Rev. John Powell, director of Truth for Youth and one of the organizers, has high expectations.

"Young people just want a place to have a good time and show off their cars and just be teen-agers," he said. "We're trying to get them in a good wholesome environment where they'll still have fun."

Leroy Williams, a Solutia technician whose first love is directing the Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association for young people, said he hopes the bashes evolve over time.

"Once we have the first one, we'll get a feeling for what these kids want, then we'll try to structure it that way," he said.

City Manager Tom Bonfield called the bash "great news."

"Everyone is superconfident it can be pulled off," he said. "We're keeping our fingers crossed because if this works it will be such a win-win situation it will be incredible."

SOLUTIONS

Teens get alternative to just hanging out

By Ginny Graybiel
News Journal staff writer

Pensacola-area kids may soon have a place to call their own.

No more driving grown-ups and police crazy by hanging out and clogging traffic at Wayside Park and at the Cervantes Street and North Ninth Avenue intersection on Sunday evenings.

Summer Bash 1 — scheduled for July 18 at the Cecil B. Hunter Municipal Pool and the surrounding area under Interstate 110 — is a joint effort of the Escambia-Pensacola Human Relations Commission, the city and several

youth advocacy groups to provide wholesome activities for youngsters age 14 through their early 20s.

The enticements: free swimming, free food, car shows with trophies, rap music and a talent contest with plenty of adults keeping an eye on things from a tactful distance.

"We just want to put this together in a real positive way," said Human Relations Commission executive director Eugene Brown.

If the bash is the smash organizers hope, it will continue on successive Sundays.

More on the bash, 1C.

Local play perfect for Valentine's

By Troy Moon
News Journal staff writer

Another play by one of Pensacola's most prolific writers hits the stage for the first time on Valentine's Day.

Playwright Leroy Williams, founder and president of the Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association, debuts "How Johnnie Mae Got Her Groove On" at the Saenger Theatre at 4 p.m. Sunday.



Williams

"It's about a woman, Johnnie Mae, who has been through all the ups and downs looking for a good man," said Williams, 35. "It's about her search and how continuing faith keeps her going in her search. It's perfect for Valentine's Day."

The play features a cast of 15 local actors, some playing multiple parts. Anita Johnson, 41, a special education teacher at Weis Elementary School, plays the title role, Johnnie Mae.

It's the third Williams play in which she has performed.

"What I like about him and his work is that it always has a spiritual message," said Johnson, who last performed in Williams' "Love Ain't Got Nothing To Do With It." "He writes about realistic situations, but always has a moral or message that anyone could understand."

Karen Green, 38, of Pensacola, agreed. She's seen two of Williams' plays — "The Senior Choir" and "Gossip Makes the World Go Around."

"He's not only active in the community," Green said. "I like that he gives local people a chance to perform on stage. I'm really looking forward to it."

Williams founded PCARA 12 years ago as a way to assist the community — mainly young at-risk black youth — in the prevention of illegal drug use, pregnancy and violence.

PCARA has now performed about a dozen of Williams' plays since the non-profit group began.

WANT TO GO?

■ **WHAT:** "How Johnnie Mae Got Her Groove On."

■ **WHEN:** 4 p.m. Sunday.

■ **WHERE:** Saenger Theatre, 118 S. Palafox St.

■ **TICKETS:** \$14 in advance, \$16 day of show. Available at area Ticketmaster locations.

■ **DETAILS:** 444-0646.



From left, Maranda McDowell, Falon Mihalic and Ian Cobin, rehearse for "The Tobacco Verdict," a play that pits smokers against non-smokers in a courtroom setting.

A kid-to-kid heart-to-heart on smoking

'The Tobacco Verdict' features 19 youngsters educating their peers through music and drama about the dangers of smoking

By Troy Moon
News Journal staff writer

Leroy Williams has been working hard for more than a decade trying to help kids.

So he feels it's only just that the tobacco industry is paying to fund his non-profit organization's latest project, a play called "The Tobacco Verdict."

"They've been targeting children for so long," said Williams, president and founder of Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association. "Now, we're using what was their money to really educate children about the harmful effects of tobacco."

On Saturday, PCARA presents

"The Tobacco Verdict," a play written and directed by Williams, 35. Nineteen performers from PCARA, ages 9 to 16, star in the play, which combines music and drama, to show a trial for the minds of children staged by pro- and anti-tobacco activists.

"The Tobacco Verdict" is sponsored and funded by Escambia HEAT (Healthy Environments Are Tobacco-Free) and Escambia SWAT (Students Working Against Tobacco). Money from Florida's landmark 1997 \$13 billion settlement with the tobacco industry supports statewide education programs aimed at middle and high school students.

Williams, who has never been a cigarette smoker, researched the tobacco industry and its products to write the play. Some of his actors say

WANT TO GO?

■ **WHAT:** The Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association performance of "The Tobacco Verdict," a play sponsored by Escambia HEAT (Healthy Environments Are Tobacco-Free) and SWAT (Students Working Against Tobacco).

■ **WHEN:** 7 p.m. Saturday.

■ **WHERE:** Saenger Theatre, 118 S. Palafox St., downtown Pensacola.

■ **TICKETS:** Admission is free.

■ **DETAILS:** 444-0646.



John Blackie/News Journal

From left, Zack Butler, Brooks McKinney and Donteus Holtz rehearse for "The Tobacco Verdict," a courtroom drama aimed at middle and high school-age students to encourage them to abstain from smoking.

if youngsters see the play, they'll be less likely to be lured into smoking.

"I know smoking is bad for you," said Brentwood Middle School sixth-grader Shameka Abney, 10, who is in her third play since joining PCARA three years ago. "What they put in cigarettes is nasty and really bad for you. And plus, smoking gives you diseases and makes your teeth yellow and things like that."

In Florida, about 35 percent of high school and 25 percent of middle school students use some form of tobacco, according to the Florida Youth Tobacco Survey conducted by the Florida Department of Health.

Nationwide, 90 percent of adult daily smokers were addicted to tobacco before age 14, according to the American Cancer Society.

About 47 million people smoke nationwide.

Williams, who has written and directed more than a dozen plays for PCARA, including "The Senior

Choir," "Crack Cocaine is Not the Way of Life" and "Love Ain't Got Nothing to do With It," founded PCARA in June 1987 as a way to assist the community, mainly young at-risk black youths, in the prevention of illegal drug use, teen pregnancy and violence.

In 1997, he received a Freedom Award from the Pensacola Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for his work with local youth.

Earlier this month in Orlando, Williams shared the stage with Gov. Jeb Bush, Florida Attorney General Bob Butterworth, the Hon. Shirley Chishold and other dignitaries at the 14th National Conference on Preventing Crime in the Black Community. More than two dozen PCARA youth made the trip and networked with other organizations and even performed a dance routine with an anti-crime theme.

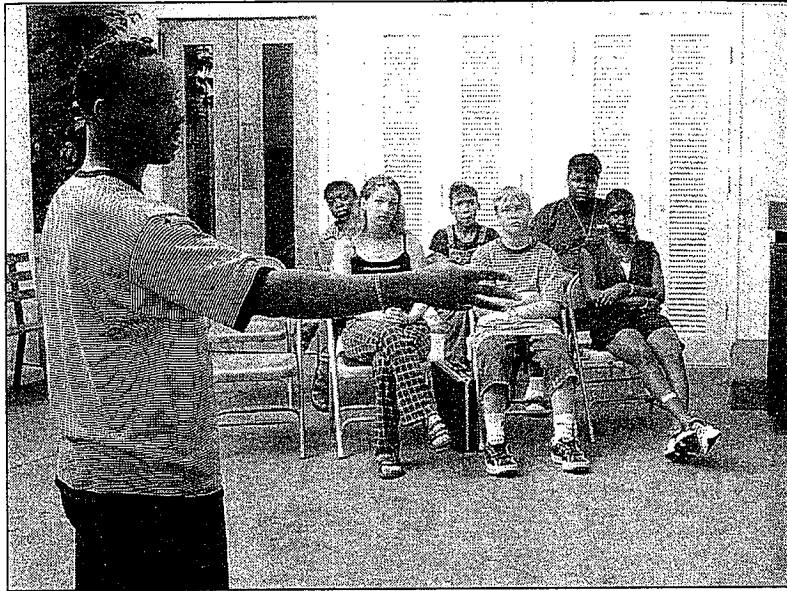
'THE TOBACCO VERDICT'

Director:
Leroy Williams
Assistant director:
Charisse Charles

CAST

Maranda McDowell, 14
Falon Mihalic, 15
Ian Cobin, 13
Quida Saunders, 15
Kimberly Sigler, 13
Ashley Williams, 12
Briana Robinson, 11
Megan McQueen, 11
Lakesha Abney, 14
Zack Butler, 15
Tashara Green, 9
Marcus Savage, 14
Veronica Lee, 13
Donteus Holtz, 16
Brooks McKinney, 13
Keundra Blankenship, 9
Shameka Abney, 10
Brandon Johnson, 12
Alicia Schue, 11

See 'TOBACCO,' 3B



John Blackie/News Journal

Leroy Williams gives direction to young actors during rehearsal for the play "The Tobacco Verdict." Williams has written and directed more than a dozen plays for PCARA.

'Tobacco Verdict' tells dangers of smoking

FROM 1B

PCARA is now reaching a wider group of youths in Escambia County, something Williams is excited about.

"We had a little tough time in the early years getting the word out, but these kids do an excellent job and they've been noticed," Williams said. "And now, we're getting a bigger cross-section of Pensacola. Kids from all walks of life."

PCARA is much more than a theater group.

It also hosts anti-drug rallies and cookouts, guest speakers and conducts meetings twice a week at the Escambia-Pensacola Human Relations Commission on South Spring Street.

Quida Saunders, 15, has been a PCARA member almost half her life — seven years.

"PCARA has given me a lot of opportunities in theater," said Saunders, 15, who will enter 10th grade at Washington High School late next month. "I've been in a lot of

plays, and I always like them because they send a positive message to people my age."

Lakesha Abney, 14, is acting in her second Williams play about substance abuse.

"I've been in a play about crack cocaine and now tobacco," said Abney, sister of Shameka. "This one is good because it doesn't just say tobacco is bad, it teaches you why it's bad."

Shameka's and Lakesha's mother, Monique Wiggins, is one of many PCARA parents who not only supports the organization, but who travels to out-of-town events, such as the Orlando conference.

"I saw what (Williams) was doing three years ago when I attended a PCARA production and I thought it was wonderful," Wiggins said. "It was just so positive and fun and fulfilling for the children, I knew we had to be involved."

Summer Bash is a smash as a hang-out alternative

By Jenny LaCoste
News Journal staff writer

The teen-agers said if organizers would provide them with a safe place to hang out and have fun, they'd be there.

They were. And so were their parents, grandparents and little brothers and sisters.

Summer Bash, the first of four planned events, drew hundreds Sunday to the

THINGS TO DO

grassy area underneath Interstate 10 near Cecil T. Hunter Municipal Pool, and those who were there said they hoped the gatherings will become a tradition.

"They should keep doing this. It's fun for us to just be together and have a good time," said Chantell Desota, 14.

The Escambia-Pensacola Human Relations Commission and the West Florida Chamber of Commerce want to see the area underneath the interstate — along Hayne Street between Avery and Blount streets — turned into a cultural park for concerts, art shows and food festivals.

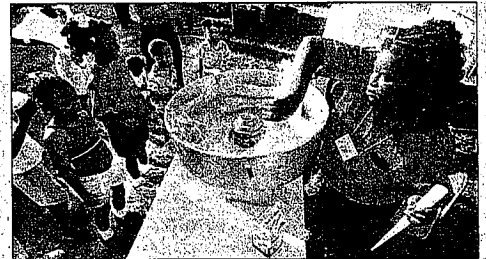
Until then, the two agencies hope it can be a vibrant, less-troublesome gathering

spot for area youth.

The inaugural event Sunday drew entire families with activities like free swimming and water contests, music by a disc jockey, three-on-three basketball, a car show and a talent show.

Summer Bash starts new tradition, 1C

Party-goers had plenty of activities to choose from, 2C



John Blackie/News Journal

Erika Davis serves cotton candy Sunday at Summer Bash 1

Teens, parents have a Bash

Hundreds attend first gathering

By Jenny LaCoste
News Journal staff writer

Wayside Park — the traditional gathering place for local teens — was deserted Sunday night. One tradition was broken and what many hope will be a new tradition was born.

For decades, teen-agers have assembled at the park off 17th Avenue at the Pensacola Bay Bridge or at the busy intersection of Ninth Avenue and Cervantes Street on Sunday afternoons and evenings. Pensacola residents have complained of near-gridlock in the areas. The youths have complained about constant police presence and about being kept from parking lots when officers say they are full.

"This keeps people from being on the street," said Tim Baldwin, 18. "Every time we go someplace, we get run off by the police. We just need somewhere to be."

This Sunday, hundreds of teens and their parents converged on a stretch of patchy grass underneath Interstate 110 for wholesome activities like free swimming and water contests at the Cecil T. Hunter Municipal Pool, music by a disc jockey, three-on-three basketball, a car show and a talent show.

Summer Bash 1 was organized by the Escambia-Pensacola Human Relations Commission and 13 other sponsors as a festival for young people from age 14 to their early 20s. Three more such events are planned for the summer.

Pensacola Police officers directed traffic and mingled with the crowd but reported no problems.

The area underneath I-110 has more space for parking and less traffic flow than the other popular hang-out spots. For those reasons, organizers saw it as a possible solution to tensions, which resurfaced the weekend before Memorial



Bruce Graner/News Journal

A large crowd gathers for the first Summer Bash held Sunday afternoon underneath Interstate 110.

"This keeps people from being on the street. ... We just need somewhere to be."

— Tim Baldwin, 18

Day when Pensacola Beach and the city sites garnered a record number of teens and young adults.

The location of Summer Bash has long been considered a possible site for concerts, art shows and food festivals. But until that idea is a reality, people who at

See **SUMMER BASH**, 4C

NEIGHBORS: A Summer Bash visual package, 2C



John Blackie/News Journal

From left, Keundra Blankenship and Jakedra Whitney get their picture taken by a member of the Road Dawgs motorcycle club Sunday during Summer Bash.

Summer Bash sizzles under summer sun



Ericka Davis dishes out cotton candy during Summer Bash 1 on Sunday afternoon. John Blackie/News Journal

From staff reports

Summer Bash 1 drew hundreds of people to the Cecil T. Hunter Municipal Pool and the surrounding area Sunday to take part in what organizers hope will become a tradition.

The Escambia-Pensacola Human Relations Commission and 13 other sponsors staged the festival in an effort to stop young people from overwhelming Wayside Park and the busy Cervantes Street and North Ninth Avenue intersection.

Instead, they were able to participate in activities that included free swimming and water contests, music by a disc jockey, three-on-three basketball, a car show and a talent show.

"It's a nice place for young people to come and

DOWNTOWN PENSACOLA



Bruce Graner/News Journal
Randi Broughton holds up a trophy while Leroy Williams introduces Jeff Wright's 1975 Chevy Caprice to the large crowd.

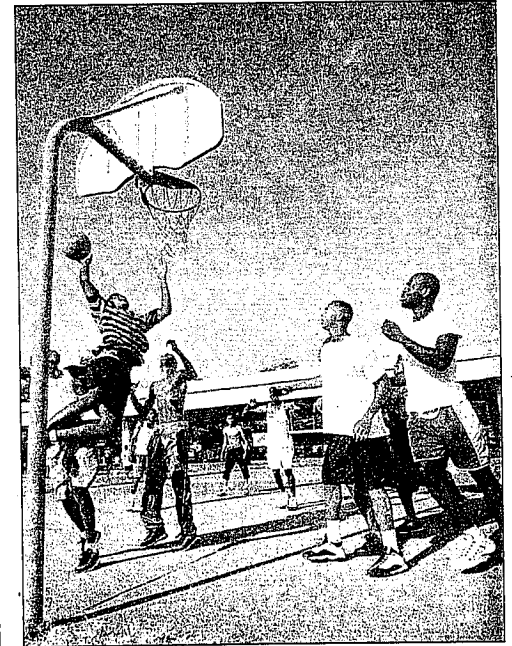
hang out," said Glenna Sanders, 14.

Organizers hope to stage three more festivals this summer.

"They should keep doing this," said Solitaire English, 13. "If I wasn't here, I'd just be sitting at home looking at T.V."



Rachel Sabree, 7, watches the entertainment Sunday afternoon during Summer Bash near Cecil T. Hunter Municipal Pool. John Blackie/News Journal



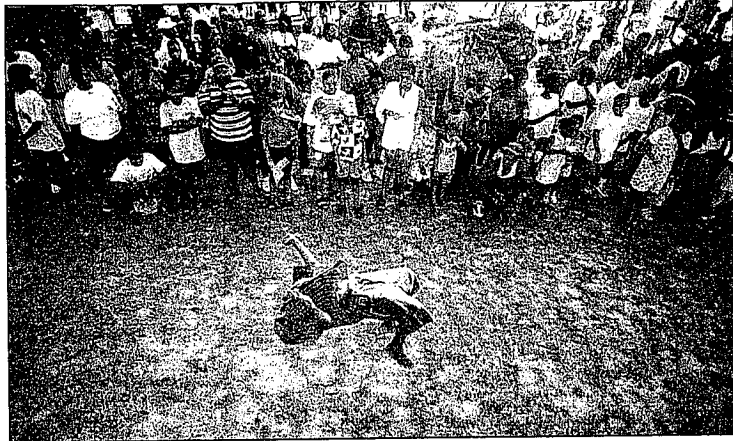
John Blackie/News Journal
Players practice for the basketball competition.

Photos by
John Blackie and Bruce Graner



Bruce Graner/News Journal

Children gather around to watch the trophies awarded in the car competition part of Summer Bash on Sunday afternoon.



John Blackie/News Journal

An acrobat does a flip for onlookers during Summer Bash near Cecil T. Hunter Municipal Pool.

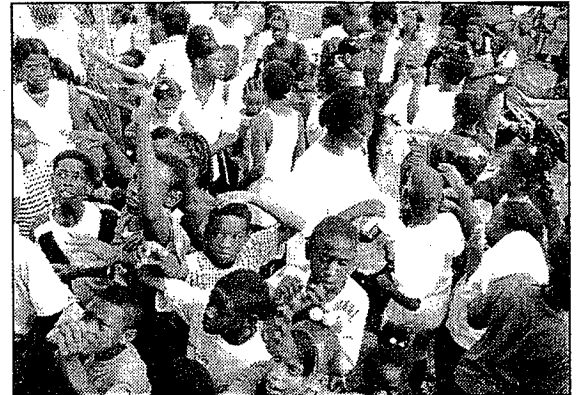
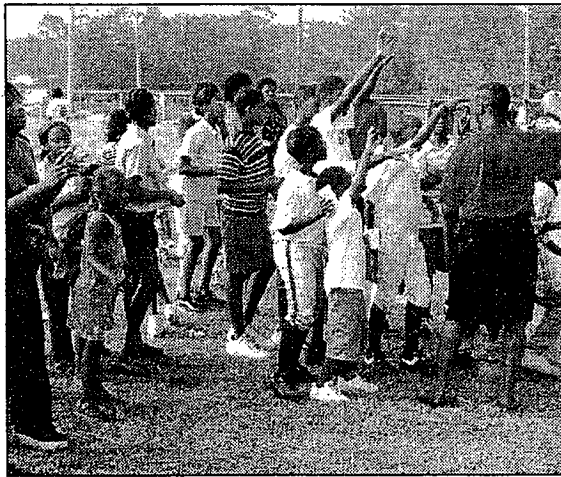


Bruce Graner/News Journal

Siarra Nolan, left, and Alexis James watch the festivities.

Community

Families and friends spend the day participating in 'The Big Cookout'



PCARA sponsored its annual 'Big Cookout' Saturday at Terry Wayne Park. Hundreds of youth participated in races, talent shows and other entertaining events.

'Summer Bash II' goes on despite overcast



"Summer Bash II" a big success despite an overcast that may have kept other would be participants away. "Summer Bash III" is scheduled this Sunday from 5:00 - 9:00 p.m. Everyone is invited to attend. *Pictured left:* Diane Franklin (l) and Tracy Perryman. *Above (l-r):* Charlie Knight (NAACP), Eugene Brown (HRC), Jerry Hunter (West Florida Chamber), Thomas Bonfield (City Manager) and an unidentified woman. *Right:* Recca Hale (HRC).
See pictorial pg. 7

'Summer Bash III' beats heat

'Summer Bash IV' set for this Sunday

by Al Henderson
Staff Writer

Despite weather forecasts of thunderstorms and the heatwave that has been scorching the country, participants turned out in overwhelming numbers to take part in "Summer Bash III" which was held last Sunday, next to the Cecil T. Hunter Municipal Pool. Organizers estimated more than 2,000 people during the event's peak; however, they added that closer to 5,000 individuals actually participated throughout the day. "Summer Bash IV" is scheduled for this Sunday and is expected to top last week.

"The response to 'Summer Bash' has been very positive especially from City staffers," commented Randi Broughton, Human Relations Commission (HRC). "We hope that the City will look closer at the proposal to turn the area into a family oriented park."

"Summer Bash IV" will be the last event this summer since school is starting. The group plans to purchase t-shirts for volunteers, present a proposal for lighting and permanent electrical fixtures to the city, and explore the idea of adding an amphitheatre.

"The event has been a huge success. After this week, we plan to get some things taken care of as to improve the outing for everyone," commented Eugene Brown, director of the HRC.

According to Broughton, the group will have all the usual festivities which has been referred to as a big family reunion; however, she did say that she has invited Roy Jones, Jr. to participate in the talent show. The festivities include 3-on-3 basketball, three-point shootout, car show, talent show, rap contest, hair show, vendors and plenty of music.

Broughton added that volunteers from the Department of Corrections were on hand last week, but she is desperate for more volunteers to participate this week.



These young ladies gather during the activities and socialize. The event has been referred to as a big family reunion.



Youth climbing the fire truck with the help of a firefighter.



State Rep. DeeDee Ritchie and James Thompson.



This group of spectators sit and watch the 3-on-3 tournament. The City provided bleachers for the tournament.



Pensacola's Black firefighters were on hand last Sunday showing kids some of the intricacies of a fire engine.



Jerry Hunter talks with McGruff the Crime Dog.



This youngster takes a seat to beat the heat Sunday.



One of the volunteers looks on as other children wait for their turn to get inside the air tent last week.

Big Cookout extends summer fun

PCARA offers families, teens a good time

By Beth Ramirez de Arellano News Journal correspondent

Summer is gone, taking with it the popular Summer Bash that provided Pensacola youth with a gathering place for fun. But the Big Cookout is coming up Oct. 2, providing a chance for teens and families to keep the festivities going a little longer.

The cookout, sponsored by the Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association, will be held at East Young Ball Park, on West Jackson Street, emphasizes a drug, alcohol, tobacco and violence-free community, said Leroy Williams, president of the group, which has been planning the event for weeks.

Williams, a nylon textile technician at Solita, founded the association nearly a decade ago to provide Pensacola youth with opportunities for recreation; for developing skills in relating to each other, their families and their community; and for just having fun. The group now numbers about 120 members.

Gerald Johnson, a 17-year-old football player at Woodham High School, joined the group a year ago. In June, he and 20 members of the association went to a youth congress in Orlando, where they stayed a week and visited Disney World and Universal Studios.

He enjoys the plays put on by group members under Williams' direction, and other activities the association offers during the week for kids from 9 to 17.

"It's a good program — everybody's friendly," he said. "Before, I just kept to myself. We talk about problems at school and discuss them. Leroy teaches a lot of different ways to deal with trouble comes — just walk away."

The cookout will be the group's sixth annual community-wide event for families and teens.

"We used to call it the 'United Together For Non-Violence Rally,' but we wanted something less formal, as a way of drawing people," Williams said. "You know, a rally is a group of people talking, but we actually have a host of events. So we're calling it the Big Cookout."

In addition to free hamburgers and hot dogs grilled by association volunteers and parents, there will be a space walk, dunking booth, and rides for the kids, along with a "fun fest" event of relay teams, competing in the mullet loss, basketball dribbling contests, and more.



Leroy Williams, center, founded the Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association nearly a decade ago. Special to the News Journal.

The association exists to foster a positive atmosphere for youth, said Charisse Charles, a paralegal who has been a group volunteer for two years. "To educate kids about issues such as drugs, teen pregnancy, alcohol and tobacco use, and discourage them from involving themselves in things like that. We try to give them other things to do and keep them motivated."

Speakers set to appear at the event include Jim May, superintendent of Escambia County Schools, and representatives of the Escambia County Sheriff's Office and the Pensacola Police Department.

Radio stations WBI-X and WYOE will have live remote broadcasts, and WYOK 104 also is expected to be on hand.

An appearance by X-OUT, a recording hip-hop artist from Atlanta, is Williams' high card, expected to draw even more than the 1,500 people who crowded last year's event.

Corey Ashe, 22, who uses the name X-OUT, and has performed at two Summer Bashes, is an Atlanta native. He's now working for a Pensacola bank and is awaiting the release of a compact disc, recorded in Atlanta, titled "Tight To Life."

"He's a real, good guy," Williams said. "His lyrics are very clean, geared toward the positive side of life. Charisse said the cookout grows each year as more people experience and enjoy it. We try to help the kids develop the self-esteem so that they can move on and do wonderful things with their lives," she said.

Want to attend?

- **WHAT:** The Big Cookout, a family event sponsored by Pensacola Community Recreation and Arts Association.
- **WHEN:** 2 p.m. until 7 p.m., Oct. 2.
- **WHERE:** Terry Wayne East Young Ball Park, West Jackson Street, between J and K streets.
- **WHO:** Teens and families.

Music draws crowds to event

By Beth Ramirez de Arellano News Journal correspondent

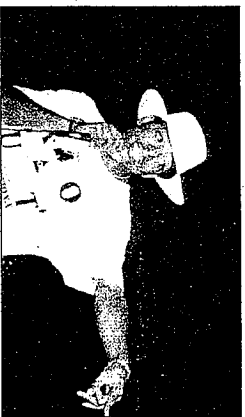
"There are families who attend the Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association's 'Big Cookout' will be drawn to the event as much by the sounds of music as by the aroma of charcoal-grilled hamburgers and hot dogs.

The organization, now nearly a decade old, has its own deejay personality, Robert Robinson, known as "Peedy Weedy," and singer "X-OUT" who has appeared at some of the Summer Bashes.

Robinson, who has been a volunteer with the association since the group's first anti-violence rally, attended Pensacola schools and played drums in the school band.

He now works at Southern Pre-Stressed Concrete as a foreman and crane operator, serves as a part-time coach for the Boys and Girls Club, and is the father of four boys ages 14, 12, 9, and 2.

Robinson said music still draws the crowd, but he avoids rap, preferring rhythm and blues and a little hip-hop. He keeps his own sons busy



Recording artist X-OUT is scheduled to perform.

with sports and said associations provide fun in a safe atmosphere. Ashe means he and his friends spent Sunday afternoons at Eaglewood Park on Leonard Street, where he began the deejay act.

"We had our own equipment, and we used to run extension cords across the street to get power from a friend's house," he said.

X-OUT, whose real name is Corey Ashe, is an Atlanta native who came to Pensacola in June. He'll be a featured performer at the cookout.

A 22-year-old high school dropout who said he craved time for juvenile crime, X-OUT is now determined to take the message of non-violence to his generation.

"I see a lot of kids living day for day. We are x-ing each other out with violence," he said. "I call it the x-ed out generation, the ones that are blinded — white, black, Hispanics — with the gang stuff. They are blinded to life. They think there is nothing else but where they are living."

"In my early teens, I ended up serving time, and I woke up," he said. "I realized that my family, my teachers and the judge were shocked, and it hurt me that I disappointed them. It all caught up with me. Now I know I have to work for positive things."

Since arriving in Pensacola in June, Ashe has performed at some local clubs while waiting for word from Atlanta of his album's release date.

"Pensacola is like my new-found home. I love this place. It's close by the water, and really laid back. I like to go to the beach and watch the waves roll in. It's mind relaxing."

But Ashe said he sees young people here lashed by the lure of violence, just as they are in Atlanta.

"Some of the kids here fight, trying to be macho, the same as Atlanta. They have the same kind of vibe," he said. "They think it's cool, that it's right to do these things. Then you might be doing life in prison — you might be dead and gone — or your closest friend is in prison, and it's too late to turn back. They don't see the outcome of it."



1998



Williams wears both activist and acting hats

Leroy Williams is a busy man. As founder and president of the Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association, he coordinates a variety of educational and social activities designed to help prevent illegal drug use, teen pregnancy and violence among youth in the Pensacola community.

But Williams' all-volunteer, non-profit organization, formed in 1987, doesn't limit itself to conventional programs. The group also can be quite creative. This is where the founder/president switches hats to become producer/director/actor.

On June 21, PCARA will present the play "Love Ain't Got Nothing To Do With It!" at the Saenger Theatre. And not only is Williams the producer, director, and lead actor, he also wrote the play — one of 14 he has penned to date.

"The story revolves around a man named Tyrome," Williams says of his play and the upbeat character he portrays. "He's lived the single life, a life on the streets, and has had an opportunity to explore different women. He finally discovers himself and decides to make a change. This play is really about change — changing from street life to home life, from the single life to family life and from non-Christian living to Christian living.

"It's a very spiritual play, but there's also a lot of humor involved."



Williams

Williams says a lot of the humor contained in "Love Ain't Got Nothing To Do With It!" stems from the fact that Tyrome clings to a '70s mentality.

"Even though he's living in the '90s, he still dresses and acts like it's the '70s," Williams says. "He just won't let that lifestyle go."

Other main characters in the play include:

■ D.J., Tyrome's best friend, played by Julius Benson.

■ Donna, D.J.'s self-centered, domineering wife, played by Kirsten Hardley.

■ Linda, a spiritual woman and Tyrome's ultimate love interest, played by Anita Johnson.

■ Mary, an outgoing hairstylist with very little self-esteem, played by Carla Robnett.

■ Rev, a single, church-going gentleman, played by Marvin Savage.

"This play is appropriate for the whole family to see and enjoy," Williams says.

Williams — a 34-year-old Pensacola native who somehow squeezes in full-time employment as a nylon technician at Solutia — is pleased with the progress his 20-member cast has

made during two months of rehearsals.

"It's all local talent," he says. "We have performers ranging in age from 13 to 40, and everyone is doing a great job."

This is PCARA's third major production at the Saenger Theatre. Last year the group presented "That Man of Mine," written by Pensacolian John Young, and in 1989 performers presented another of Williams' creations, "Crack Cocaine Is Not the Way of Life."

This June 21 program will open with a pre-performance concert at 4 p.m., featuring "some of Pensacola's finest gospel performers," Williams says. The Spiritual Kings, the Sensational Echoes, Dr. Janice Crenshaw, Poshae and the PCARA Steppers are scheduled to perform.

The play begins at 4:30 p.m. and the sounds of gospel music are also heard at times in the course of the story, performed by members of the cast.

Andy Metzger writes about performing arts for the Pensacola News Journal. Write to Front Row, Pensacola News Journal, P.O. Box 12710, Pensacola, FL 32574, or e-mail at PNJLife@gulfisurf.infi.net



ANDY METZGER
Front row

WANT TO GO?

■ **WHAT:** "Love Ain't Got Nothing To Do With It!" — a production of the Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association. Also features gospel singing from Pensacola groups.

■ **WHEN:** 4 p.m. June 21.

■ **WHERE:** Saenger Theatre, 116 S. Palafox St.

■ **COST:** \$16 in advance, \$18 at the door. Tickets are available at the Saenger Theatre Box Office and the Sound Shop in University Mall. Charge by phone: 800-488-5252.

■ **DETAILS:** 444-0646.

PENSACOLA

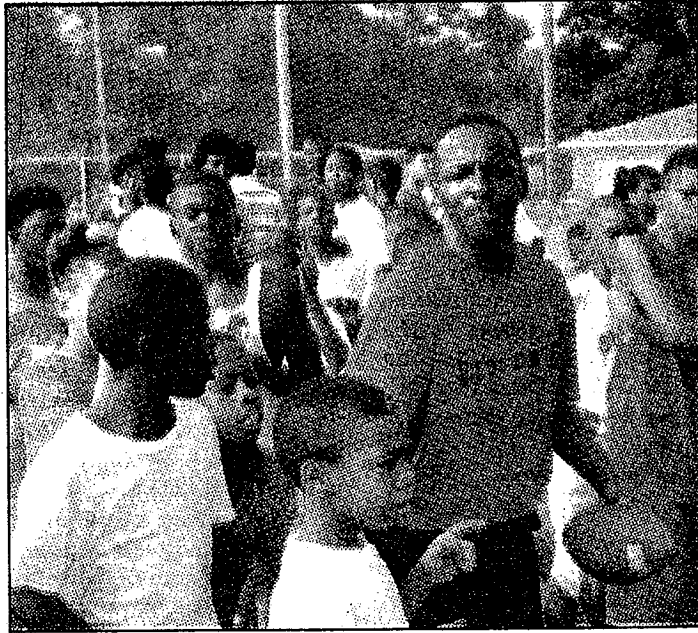
Cookout to benefit anti-drug efforts

The Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association is holding a cookout at 2 p.m. Oct. 10 at the Terry Wayne East Youth Ball Park on West Jackson Street.

All proceeds will go to help promote a non-violent and drug-free community. Organizers also are seeking participants for a talent show. The cookout is open to the public.

Details: 444-0646.

PCARA holds annual 'Big Cookout'



PCARA held its annual "Big Cookout" for the community to celebrate a drug and tobacco free event at Terry Wayne Park Saturday. Area youth got an opportunity to participate in a number of activities. (l) A volunteer helps a youth during an eating contest. (c) LeRoy Williams, director, divides youth into teams. (r) WBLX personality, Ray Ray, prepares youth for dance contest.



1997



Annual rally brings home message of non-violence

By Dexter Chambers
News Journal staff writer

It took nearly 23 years for Leroy Williams, a textile technician at Solutia Inc., to leave the comforts of home and the West Jackson Street neighborhood he grew up in.

Now that he is living the life he had dreamed of as a child, to him real success comes only when he is able to help others who need it the most.

"It feels good to give something back as a former member of this community who made it in life despite all the odds against me," said Williams, 33.



Williams

On Saturday, Williams and members of the Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association — a group he co-founded 10 years ago — did just that by sponsoring a free cookout at the Terry Wayne East youth ballpark dubbed "United Together for Non-Violence Day."

The fifth annual gathering brought out several hundred children and young adults for a day of fun and more importantly, a non-violent event.

Banners were flung throughout the ball park stressing the theme of the day-long event. Participants rallied around a central podium to listen to speakers talk about resolving conflicts without violence.

It all happened the same week in which the U.S. Justice Department reported that juvenile arrests for violent crime dropped a whopping 9.2 percent for 1996 — the latest data available for the 10- to 17-year-old age group. But Williams and other group members say they won't stop until youth violence and arrests are completely a thing of the past — especially in Pensacola.

"Here we are sending a message to the community that it's time to put down the gun and set aside your egos if only for one day," Williams said. "There is a positive side of life.

"Although we know we can't help them all today but at least we will reach someone."

Jerome Watson, deputy superintendent for the Escambia County School District and guest speaker, said much of the problem stems from a lack of self-worth and self-esteem among today's young people.

"A lot of it starts in the home. You can't wait and teach those things when a child turns 13 or 14 years old. You have to start early," he said. "In order to keep kids



Watson

away from violence, we must also teach them to set positive societal goals. After that, they must be taught how to achieve those goals."

Solutia Inc. (formerly Monsanto) was one of the main sponsors for this year's cookout, said plant manager and guest speaker Joe Ochsner.

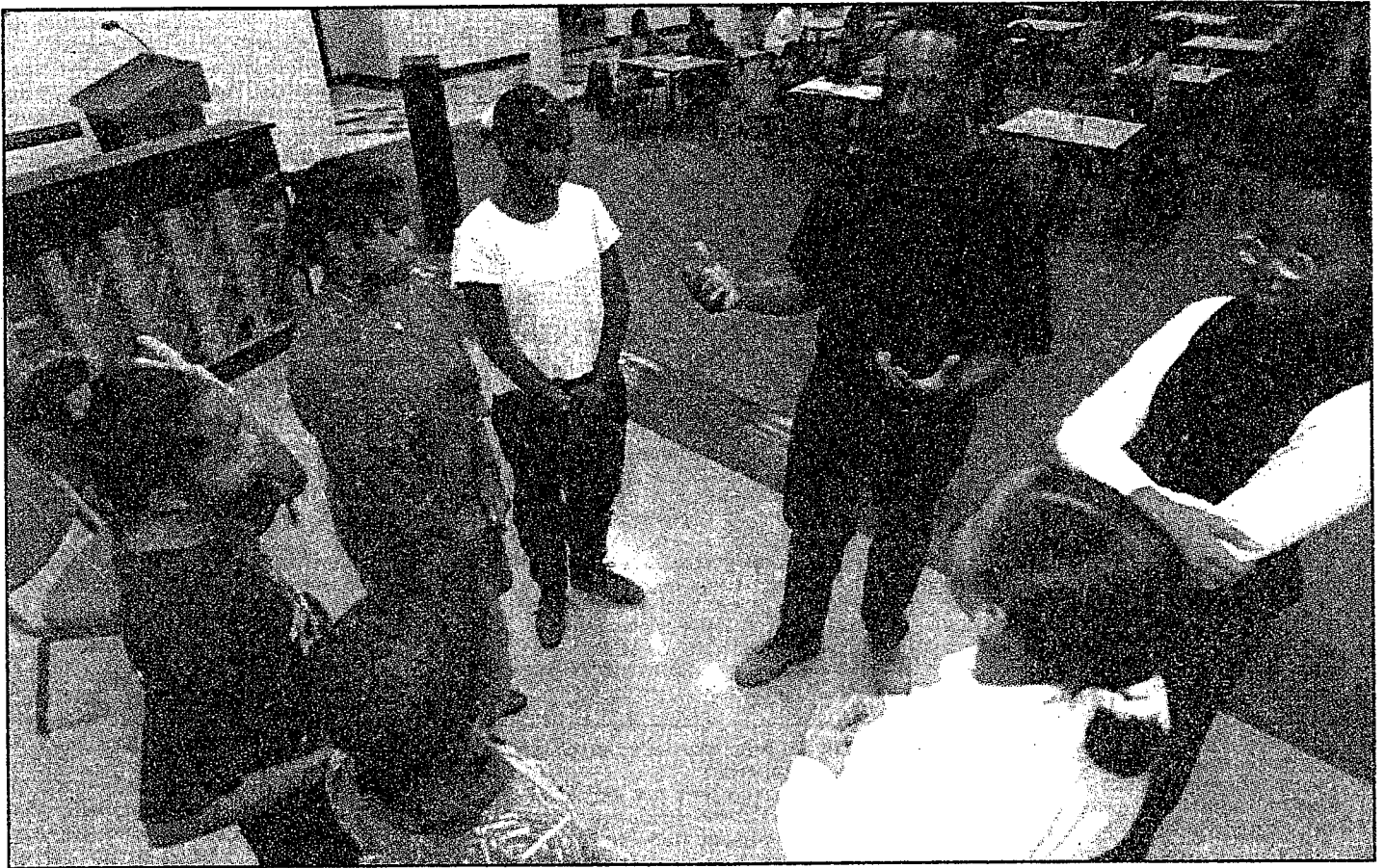
"We hope that the children see some role models who are motivating and encouraging and who provide a brighter vision for the future," he said.

Pensacola resident Isaac Walton, 23, said he heard about the event on the radio. It was his first time coming out to a non-violence rally.

"Violence remains a major problem because there's not a lot of discipline," said the University of West Florida criminal justice major. "Although I think it's getting better, younger kids today still have a lot to deal with."

**“All we’re trying to do is make Pensacola a better place to live,
and make our children better citizens, people and future role models.”**

– Leroy Williams, Pensacola Community Arts & Recreation Center co-founder



Tony Giberson/News Journal photographer

Cast members of “The Senior Choir” listen as writer-director Leroy Williams, center, gives instructions. Clockwise from Williams’ left are: Moranda McDowell, Veronica Lee, Kenari Guest, Kenita Mitchell, Paula Cage and Quida Saunders.

Giving kids an alternative

Pensacola Community Arts & Recreation Association teaches youths dedication, professionalism

CAST LISTS

"The Senior Choir"

Mikese Morse
Quida Saunders
Paula Cage
Veronica Lee
Kenita Mitchell
Moranda McDowell
Kenari Guest

"Gossip Makes The World Go Around"

Carla Robnett
Tamara Whiten
Lynnetta Gilmore
Julius Benson
Andrew Lovings
Brian Quest
Leroy Williams
Paula Dean

By Troy Moon
News Journal staff writer

Leroy Williams stands in front of the five children on stage, his left hand on his chin lending him the quiet focus of "The Thinker," and listens to the gossip fly.

"Sit down, Sister Jenkins, and tell us what you heard," one of the youngsters blares out to a fellow gossip.

Williams doesn't like what he's hearing. It's not that he's upset by the gossip, it's that the other children aren't paying close enough attention to the gossip.

"Young lady, what are you distracted about?" Williams asks one of the girls on stage whose eyes have wandered during a dress rehearsal of "The Senior Choir," which Williams adapted from a Langston Hughes story.

"What are you distracted about?"

The 10-year-old girl with a ponytail and an infectious smile looks down at her tapping feet.

"What are you distracted about?" Williams, 33, asks one more time. "There are going to be hundreds of people here on show day and you cannot be distracted. You have to be professional."

Williams wants everything, everyone he comes in contact with, to be professional.

He especially wants that for his newest plays, "The Senior Choir" and "Gossip Makes The World Go Around," two productions that Pensacola Community Arts & Recreation Association will perform Saturday at the Pensacola Junior College.

"The Senior Choir" will be performed by seven PCARA children, ages 10 to 13. "Gossip Makes The World Go Around" features an adult cast using seasoned actors from Pensacola Junior College and the University of West Florida.

The all-volunteer casts wait around the PJC student center, along with a handful of parents, to watch Williams, a Monsanto technician, work with the performers.

Williams and good friend Brian Guest founded the nonprofit PCARA in June 1987 as a way to assist the community, mainly young at-risk black youths, in the prevention of illegal drug

ACHIEVEMENT

use, pregnancy and violence.

During breaks, Williams keeps an eye on the children. They sit at tables, studying lines, talking sports. They talk about the Super Bowl — one wears an anti-drug DARE shirt — cheerfully arguing about whether the Green Bay Packers Super Bowl appearance was a fluke.

"Cowboys will be back next year," says the bright-eyed Kenari Guest, 10, a fifth-grader at A.A. Dixon Elementary School.

"They're all great kids, but kids can always fall into temptation," Williams says. "We try to provide an alternative ... sometimes, temptation is hard to resist."

Many of the parents involved with PCARA are amazed that Williams was able to rise above a tragic background to become a much-respected role model.

In 1983, his father was murdered at a construction site by a disgruntled co-worker. His mother died three days later, a victim of illness and shock. He came from a poverty-stricken downtown Pensacola area where, he says, drugs and violence were a part of everyday life. Even family life.

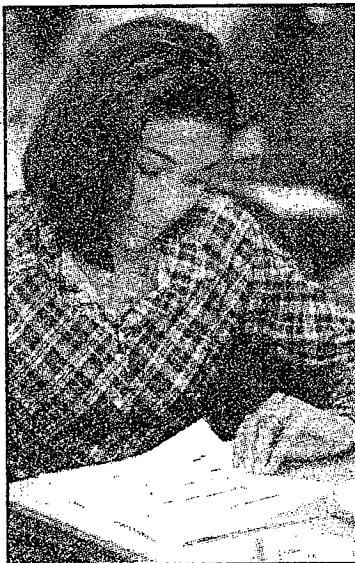
"There was so much tragedy in my life," he says quietly. "There were times I wanted to give up. There were times I was tempted and could have gone in a different direction. But I've always had the determination to be one of the few to make it out of there and become someone. To make it through."

The parents and children who work with him say he has made it.

"He's a wonderful person," says Quida Saunders, 38, a second-grade teacher at Oakcrest Elementary School, whose daughter Quida, 12, is in the children's play. "The way I see it, he's got the personality that kids can relate to and uses that to help them strive for the positive. He's dedicated and committed to these kids. Once, he came to the house and they all got so excited because to them, he is *the man*."

Amanda Richardson, mother of 12-year-old Kenita Mitchell, the young actress in the DARE shirt and a pair of red tennis shoes, ditto Saunders' praise.

"He is so good at raising children's self-esteem," Richardson says. "He gives them the ability and, more



Carla Robnett studies her lines for "Gossip Makes the World Go Around."

WANT TO GO?

■ **WHAT:** Two plays by the Pensacola Community Arts & Recreation Association. "The Senior Choir" features child actors. "Gossip Makes The World Go Around" features adult actors.

■ **WHEN:** 7 p.m. Saturday

■ **WHERE:** Ashmore Fine Arts Auditorium, Pensacola Junior College.

■ **ADMISSION:** \$10.

■ **DETAILS:** 800-844-1568. To join PCARA or to help sponsor other PCARA events, call 444-0646.



K. Guest



O. Saunders

See **PLAY, 3B**

Play program gives kids an alternative

FROM 1B

importantly, the chance to act, sing, dance. He's given them exposure — positive exposure.

"He makes the parents feel good, the children feel good. There's just so much positive energy around him. He's a great young man. You'd hope that any male in your family would grow up to be like Leroy."

"Because when I watch him strive and accomplish even more, despite his background, I know anyone with a heart can do it. And when I watch him with the young people, he glows."

And the young people shine brightly in that glow.

"He's a great teacher because you know what to expect from him," says Paula Cage, 13, an eighth-grade student at Pensacola Christian Academy. "He's starting us while we're young. Getting us into plays. Working with us. Helping our self-confidence. He's a great teacher."

Kenari, nephew of Brian Guest, says Williams expects one thing — dedication.

"He doesn't like quitters," says Kenari, bundled in his Cowboys' jacket. "If you start something, you should finish it. That's his lesson. He doesn't like people who come in here and start something and then quit in the middle. For example, there was a person who started named ..."

Whoa! What about the lesson of "The Senior Choir" — that gossip hurts?

"I'm sorry," Kenari says. "I didn't do that intentionally, but sometimes it's hard not to gossip. That's one of the lessons he's trying to teach us."

Most of the children have participated in one of the dozens of productions Williams has organized since 1987.

He's helped them discover techniques for memorizing lines and overcoming stage fright — even if he needs a little help from above to

accomplish his mission.

"When I first started, I was a little scared about learning my lines," says the beaming, giggly Veronica Lee, 10, a fifth-grader at N.E. Cook Elementary. "Plus, I prayed for help."

Quida gives Veronica a funny look.

"I DID!" Veronica says. "I prayed because I was nervous and wanted to do it right."

PCARA has been trying to do it right since its inception.

Despite nearly a dozen plays, the group has performed, PCARA also

has organized festivals, a boxing organization, nonviolence marches through the streets of downtown Pensacola, community cookouts and weekly meetings.

"All we're trying to do is make Pensacola a better place to live, and make our children better citizens, people and future role models," Williams says. "That's all we're about."

Shows: \$1.50-\$2.00
 MIXED SERVICE/ADRENALIN
47-154
 KING CLIN - FUN
 BEAVIS & BUTT-HEAD (PG-13) 5:30-7:00
 STAR TREK: NEXT CONTACT (PG-13) 7:00-8:30
 DAYLIGHT (PG-13) 8:15-9:45
 JINGLE ALL THE WAY (PG) 9:00-10:15
 ROMEO & JULIET (PG-13) 9:45-11:00
 WABB TWO FOR 25DAY

Gull Breere Cinema
 FOOD WORLD SHOPPING CENTER
 1175 GULF BREEZE PARKWAY 934-5435
 "ZEUS & ROXANNE" (PG) DAILY 2:30-4:45-7:00
 "TURBULENCE" (R) DAILY 8:30 ONLY
 "JERRY MAGUIRE" (R) DAILY 4:30 & 8:15
 "ONE FINE DAY" (PG) DAILY 1:35 & 7:00
 "IN LOVE AND WAR" (PG-13) DAILY 2:30-4:45-7:15-9:45
 "BEVERLY HILLS NINJA" (PG-13) DAILY 2:30-4:45-7:15-9:45
 *Movies & Showtimes Valid 12/4/97 thru 1/20/98
 *STARTING 10/1/97 "STARS WAR"

Local NAACP chapter to present annual Freedom Awards

By Lisa Rhue
 News Journal staff writer

For 10 years, Leroy Williams has used the performing arts as a way to help young blacks avoid drugs and alcohol, teen pregnancy and violence.

As co-founder of the nonprofit Pensacola Community Arts and Recreation Association, Williams has provided guidance for hundreds of at-risk black youth through theater, drama and dance. Williams, 33, will be honored tonight for his work in the community during the Seventh Annual Freedom Awards Banquet, sponsored by the Pensacola Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The banquet honors people for being positive role models and recognizes organizations and industry for helping minorities in the community. Nelson B. Rivers III, regional director of the Southeast Region of the NAACP, will be guest speaker.

ACHIEVEMENT

sored by the Pensacola Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The banquet honors people for being positive role models and recognizes organizations and industry for helping minorities in the community.

Nelson B. Rivers III, regional director of the Southeast Region of the NAACP, will be guest speaker.

WANT TO GO?

- **WHAT:** Seventh Annual Freedom Awards Banquet.
- **WHEN:** 7 tonight.
- **WHERE:** West Florida District Association Baptist Center, 2400 W. Strong St.
- **COST:** \$25 per person.

"It means a lot to me to be honored by the NAACP," Leroy Williams said. "It's a just a great feeling."
 Williams said God has helped him through some rough times, so

he feels it's his responsibility to help others. He said it's gratifying to see some of the youngsters succeed as they grow up.

Giving awards is just a small way that the NAACP can say thanks, said Viola Harrison, one of the presenters at tonight's function.

"When we can give back to the community we have made a remarkable difference," Harrison said. "That's what it's all about."
 The other award recipients are:

■ Margaret Williams, who will receive the Dr. Robert Walker Jr. Award for her role as spokeswoman for Citizens Against Toxic Exposure. Williams led a movement to help relocate 358 families who lived in an area that the Environmental Protection Agency listed as a contaminated Superfund site. The award is named in honor of Walker, who was a Pensacola Junior College professor and NAACP officer.

■ The Rev. John Powell, who will receive an award for his work as founder of Truth for Youth, an organization that works to build self-esteem and pride among young people.

■ Catoura East, a 1997 Pensacola High School graduate, who will receive a \$1,000 scholarship for her academic achievements and outstanding leadership among young blacks.

■ Monsanto Co. will be recognized for an ongoing program which provides computers to elementary schools throughout Escambia County.



L. Williams



M. Williams



Rev. Powell