

# CEASEFIRE

**FELONS WITH GUNS DO TIME.**

June 3, 2003

Alderman Michael Murphy  
Milwaukee City Hall  
200 East Wells Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Alderman Murphy,

I just want to refresh your memory about the CEASEFIRE Summer Arts Initiative and what we are planning for this coming summer. Your assistance in helping make this a reality is much appreciated.

The Summer Arts Initiative was created to develop an anti-gun violence message created by City of Milwaukee teenagers for their peers. The original partnership consisted of Milwaukee Public Schools Summer Stars Program, Safe & Sound, CEASEFIRE, and Theatre X. The 2001 initiative resulted in a traveling performing arts performance with 30 appearances at various Milwaukee sites that had youth summer activities. Over the ten-week project, twenty City of Milwaukee teenagers created a performance over the course of the first four weeks and spent the last six weeks performing throughout Milwaukee.

Last year the initiative's partnership expanded to include Marquette University's Dramatic Arts Department. Milwaukee Public Television also produced a 60-minute documentary about the 2002 performance and its performers and their stories about Milwaukee's gun violence. Each year the youth troupe has received much praise for their efforts and performance and the program was reported by the U.S. Department of Justice to include in *Project Safe Neighborhoods, Best Practices, Volume II Report* last fall.

Putting together this summer's production has been difficult to say the least. Due to budget woes this year Milwaukee Public Schools was not able to participate and fund the employment of the youth involved in the project this summer. Although we are still searching for funding to pay wages to the teenagers involved with this project we are looking to work with teens that will receive therapeutic benefit of participating in this project.

Project Ujima has agreed to be the lead agency this year and the youth that it works with will provide the creative and artistic direction of the project. Project Ujima provides hospital, home and community-based services to juveniles injured by firearms, since 1995. Due to its affiliation with Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, Project Ujima has many resources available to assist victims with medical care, psychological care, youth and family

development, legal assistance and gang intervention, with the goal of reducing the number of repeat victims of violence.

The goal of this summer's program is not only to create an affective anti-gun violence message for Milwaukee's youth, but also help heal juvenile victims of gun violence. Juvenile firearm victims will participate both as creators and writers of the performance as well as the actors performing. These tasks will help the victims cope with the trauma they experienced, increase their ability to communicate their traumas to their peers, self-esteem, and increase their ability to cooperate in a positive group activity.

All of the partners appreciate your offer to discuss funding with both Mr. Abele and Mr. Bader. If we are able to receive funding from the city and each of their foundations will make this summer's production a reality. At the conclusion of this year's performance, Marquette University will become more vested in the Initiative and will have the responsibility of sustaining this program through their grant funding department.

Along with the attached 2003 budget are two copies of the documentary that Milwaukee Public Television made from last year's performance. I believe that tape may be the best presentation to give Mr. Bader and Mr. Abele to understand the scope and importance of this initiative. If we are to reduce gun violence in this city, it will take more than a law enforcement initiative. It will take a long-term strategy that changes the behavior of those who think it is acceptable to illegally possess a firearm. I believe this youth created and performed arts performance generates the most affective anti-gun violence message for Milwaukee's youth.

Please feel free to call me at 414.297.1246 if you have any questions or concerns. Finally, feel free to have either Mr. Bader or Mr. Abele call me if they need me to provide them with any historical perspective of the project.

Sincerely,



Will Christianson

Coordinator

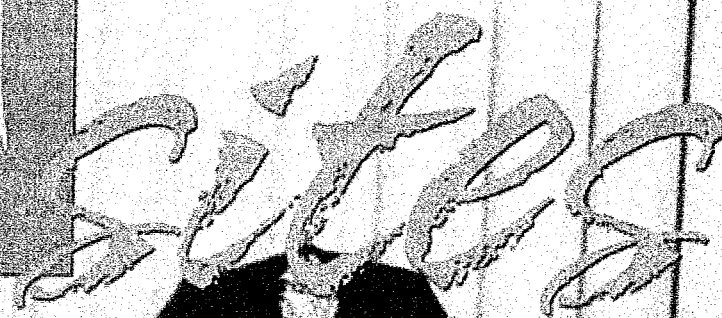
CEASEFIRE

U.S. Department of Justice  
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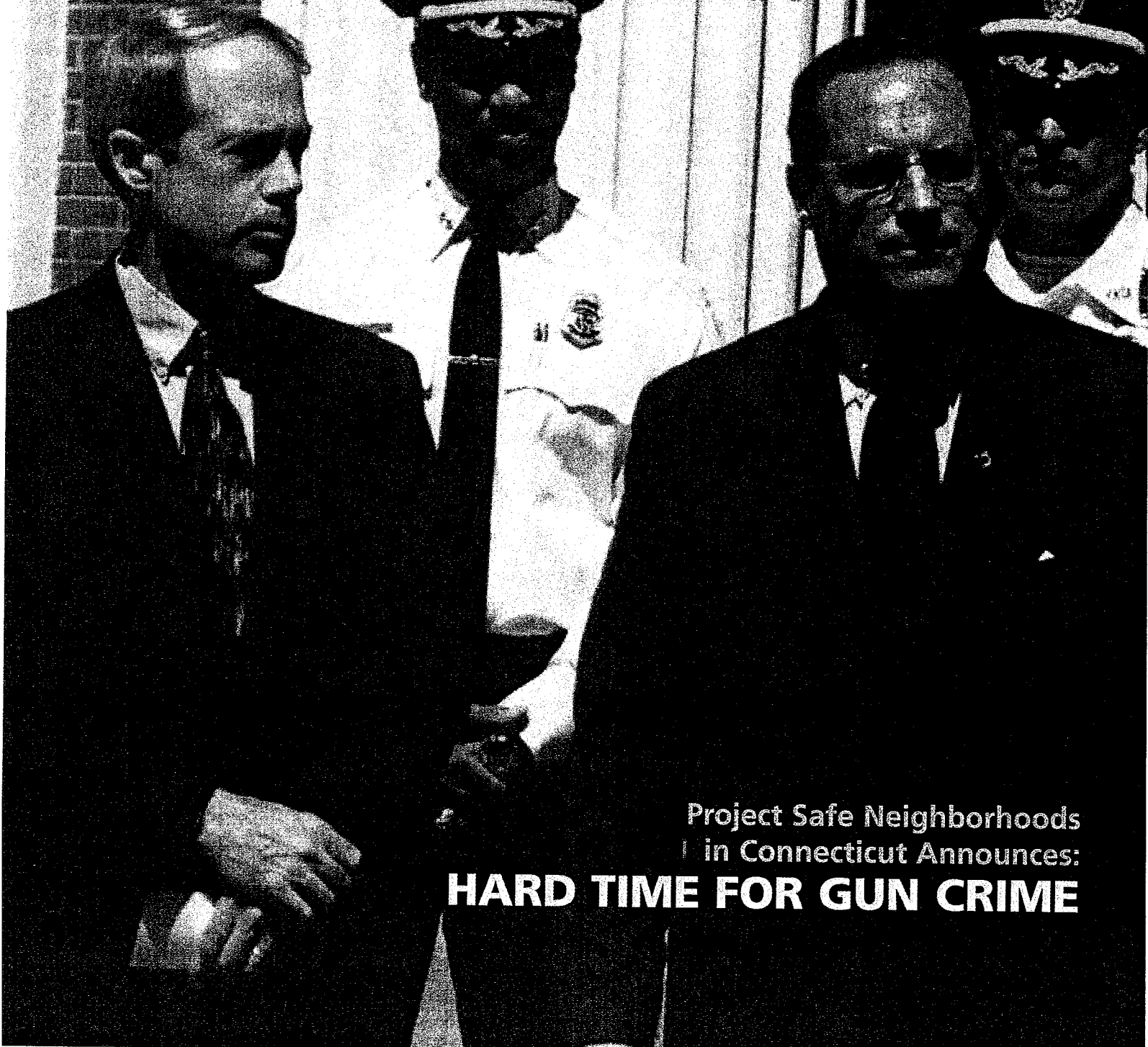


Summer 2002  
Volume X, Number 2

WEED & CRIME



M A G A Z I N E



Project Safe Neighborhoods  
in Connecticut Announces:

# HARD TIME FOR GUN CRIME

## "One Milwaukee Night"

### Milwaukee Youth Send Anti-Gun-Crime Message in Summer Arts Program

"Imagine a major city where there are no gun homicides," said 16-year-old Alex Tillett-Saks. "And if one does occur, the whole community is outraged and works together to end the violence." Nineteen other teens who created and perform "One Milwaukee Night" share his zero-tolerance dream with the support of Milwaukee's Weed and Seed.

With direction from local theater professionals, "One Milwaukee Night" was coordinated last summer as a theatrical

project by 20 youth from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The 10-week project was a collaboration of Milwaukee Public Schools' Summer Stars Program, a local prevention-through-the-arts initiative; Safe & Sound, a community-based crime fighting initiative; and Theatre X, a nationally known and respected local arts company. Together, they created a youth theatrical project to address the underlying issues that contribute to gun violence. The partnership supports CEASEFIRE, a public-private initiative to reduce gun

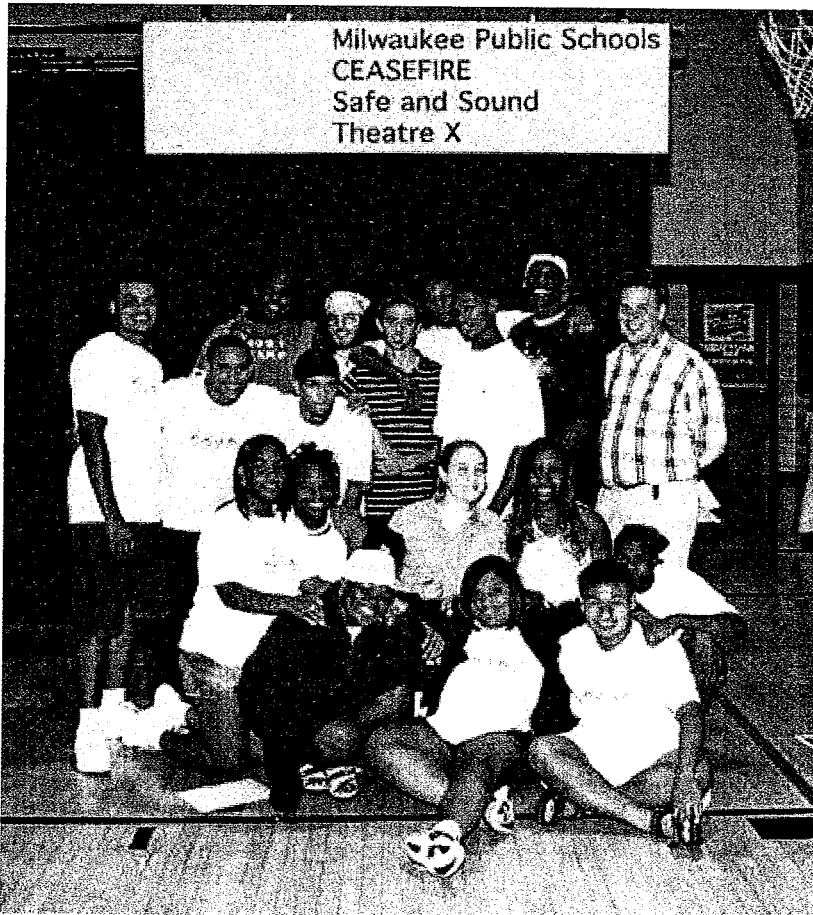
violence in Milwaukee County. "What better way to convey an antigun violence message to kids than through the experiences of their peers," said James Santelle, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Wisconsin.

The project took its first step in May 2001 by holding auditions in the community. Announcements and word of mouth advertised that Theatre X would hold auditions for teenage actors. For many youth familiar with theater, this audition was different. No songs were sung and no scripts were read. Instead, Theatre X staff asked each auditioning teenager to tell a story about how gun violence had affected his or her life.

"We were not looking so much at the acting ability of the participants as much as their personal experiences with gun violence and an enthusiasm to try something new," commented David Ravel, Producing Director of Theatre X.

The end result was a youth troupe comprising a diverse group of teenagers with a wide range of theatrical experience who had all been affected by gun violence. They named their troupe "People Against Gun Violence Everywhere" and spent the next 4 weeks writing and developing "One Milwaukee Night." The final 50-minute program was a series of skits and poetry about the cast's life experiences with gun violence. Recognizing the power of their project, the cast added a discussion with the audience at the conclusion of each performance.

"It's inevitable that there will be questions and comments from kids in the audience," said John Schneider, Director. "The cast members felt it was necessary that they address those questions in front of the whole audience."



Members of the theatrical production "One Milwaukee Night" gather together on the evening of their last performance, which took place at the North Central YMCA in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Original URL: <http://www.jsonline.com/news/Metro/may03/143460.asp>

## Another chance at life

### Project Ujima steps in after violence to help children, families heal, end dangerous cycle

By LEONARD SYKES JR.  
[lsykes@journalsentinel.com](mailto:lsykes@journalsentinel.com)

*Last Updated: May 26, 2003*

Among the examples of teenagers who understand that there are sometimes second and third chances in life, count Bradley Tech High School senior Deon Wright.

Last July, as gunmen aimlessly fired shot after shot at parked cars in a neighborhood on the city's north side, Wright, 18, and a friend got caught in the shooting.

The nine random bullets missed his friend. But one of them hit Wright, a star running back and City Conference wrestling champion, in the stomach.

As the bullet traveled through his abdomen and liver and up to his lung, Wright, not yet realizing he had been shot, looked down at his stomach, felt a burning sensation and saw blood soaking through his T-shirt. It did not take him long to realize that the bullet would soon change more lives than his own.

Hours later, recovering from surgery at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, Wright saw the trauma created by the shooting change his family.

His mother quit her job to be with him at the hospital. His family kept a vigil at his side. And then, for Wright, came the most devastating news of all. "(Doctors) told me I couldn't play football for nine months," said Wright, who had attracted the attention of Ivy League schools such as Princeton.

"I was mad at that point. At times I wished that I had died. Then I was just mad again. I didn't want anyone to come into my room. I was trying to shut everything and everyone off."

Those feelings began to wane, he said, when Project Ujima intervened.

Ujima, a Swahili word meaning a working together, became exactly that for the Wright family. The program, now a standard part of emergency room operations at Children's Hospital for assault-related injuries, offered a wide range of services, from counseling to the financial help that his mother, Sheri Sapwell, eventually received.

The success of Project Ujima, which helped well over 300 children last year with assault-related injuries, now has two professors at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and their students hoping to produce research that could guide other hospitals toward developing similar programs.

Assistant professors Hobart Davies and Bonita Klein-Tasman, who both coordinate mental health services for Project Ujima, believe there are definite links between community violence and psychological problems among its victims and their families - including post-traumatic stress disorder.

### Project Ujima



*Photo/Gary Porter*

Sheri Sapwell takes a picture of her son Deon Wright, 18, Friday by the car he was driving to prom later that night. Wright hadn't driven the Cadillac Eldorado since July, when he was shot in a random shooting on the north side of Milwaukee.



*Photo/Gary Porter*

Wright gets ready for his prom. Project Ujima helped the Bradley Tech High School senior sort out his feelings about the attack.

Davies said they are documenting the wide range of problems experienced by families that are victims of violence. Project Ujima, which strives to prevent the victims of violence from repeat visits to the emergency room, is being used as the clinical model for the study.

The program is a collaborative effort among Children's Hospital, UWM, the Medical College of Wisconsin and the Kujichagulia Lutheran Center. The alarming number of children sent to the emergency room at Children's Hospital reached its zenith in 1998 with 500 cases from violence. About 80% of those injuries were firearms related.

While homicides declined in 2002 in Milwaukee with 108 - a 15% drop from the 127 in 2001 - officials said injuries related to gun violence haven't, and the severity of the injuries is increasing.

"We see these (trips to the emergency room) as both an indicator that there's been trouble in the past and that there will likely be trouble in the future," says Davies, director of the Child Stress and Coping Lab in UWM's psychology department.

But the program, said Davies, is also realistic about what it attempts to accomplish. If a child who has been a victim of violence is returned to school, "that's a major accomplishment," he said, "even if we haven't changed the nature of all the family interactions."

The best outcome is the fact that many of the children who come through the program seldom return to the emergency room, said Wendi K. Heuermann, project manager.

When the program first began in 1995, Heuermann said, staff saw many more children than they see now in the emergency room, and many of them were coming back three or four times. Some died as a result of their injuries.

Project Ujima provides counselors who work with the family through most of the healing process associated with violence, including interaction with the criminal justice system.

"Mostly, we want to make sure that they're going to be safe when they return home from the hospital," said Heuermann. "We want to make sure that wherever they were injured, there's a safety plan in place even to the point of helping them relocate."

But there's also treatment in the aftermath of violence for the family. Michael McCart, a counselor with the program, said symptoms of exposure to violence run the gamut from depression to post-traumatic stress disorder to dissociation.

Project Ujima's community liaison counselor, Darryl Hall, who has been working with the Wright family since Deon's injury last summer, found some of those symptoms in Wright.

The first meetings were awkward, but as Wright worked through his initial anger, Hall said, he began to develop a relationship with him.

"We tried not to focus too much on what had happened," said Hall of their first few conversations.

"We talked about things we could do to help normalize the trauma and focus on some realistic goals, like things he could do afterward."

Wright made an amazing recovery. He won the 215-pound wrestling championship title in December and despite orders from his doctors, returned to playing football three months after being released from the hospital.

He plans to enroll at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in the fall and continue playing football there.

The purpose of the UWM study, Davies said, is to provide a broader picture of the environment that sets up youths such as Wright for injury and collect data that will provide a kind of "best practices model" for parents and mental health professionals.

Thus far, Heuermann said, children and their families who have turned down offers to receive help from Project Ujima have an 18% return injury rate and are likely to return to the emergency room a second and third time. A citywide survey by the Medical College of Wisconsin that tracked children in Project Ujima found that less than 2% of them had a repeat injury in

2001, and in 2002, the repeat rate for Ujima patients was about 1%.

"We know we're making an impact," Heuermann said.

Wright has since become a spokesman for the program. He's taken his message to high schools, television programs and community meetings.

His message, he said, is aimed mostly at criminals, particularly the ones in his case who were never caught.

"I'm telling criminals not to hurt anyone," he said, "because when you hurt someone, you're hurting everyone around them - their families and friends.

"It changes everyone's life."

From the May 26, 2003 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

## Summer Arts Partnership

Project Ujima, CEASEFIRE, Marquette University, and Theatre X

Item	Cost
Director	\$ 7,700
Stage Manager	\$ 5,700
Actor Coaches	\$ 5,700
Administrative Overhead (Theatre X & MU)	\$ 10,000
Payroll service and taxes	\$ 5,000
Sound Design/Equipment	\$ 1,500
Costume design/construction	\$ 2,000
Set design/construction	\$ 2,500
Prop design/construction	\$ 1,000
Materials (set/costumes/props/rehearsal)	\$ 4,000
Miscellaneous	\$ 1,500
Photocopying	\$ 400
Administrative expenses	\$ 1,000
Transportation (bus & truck)	\$ 2,000

**Total 2003 budget \$ 50,000**

Based on a 10 week schedule and a minimum of 24 performances. Cast will be made up of 10-15 performers/writers and stage hands.



# Play warns of danger of guns

*Teens act out scenes that have been all too familiar in their neighborhoods*

By JAMAAL ABDUL-ALIM  
of the Journal Sentinel staff

When he takes the stage in a play meant to teach children about the dangers of guns, 17-year-old Hank McGowan plays a boy who is shot and killed by two men who were aiming at a friend he tried to talk out of selling drugs.

In real life, he is the cousin of a 17-year-old boy killed under similar circumstances in a still-unsolved double homicide.

Similar stories can be told by the rest of the 14 teenagers in "T.A.G. - You're It," a play the youngsters are performing across the city to emphasize the perils of packing a pistol and the senselessness of gunplay.

All of the youths have been affected by gun violence in some way. Some have lost loved ones to the epidemic. One even speaks of sitting in a car hit by gunfire meant for someone else.

All are keenly aware of how they could have easily become victims, a reality underscored by a statistic cited in the play: Homicide is the leading cause of death among black males ages 15 to 24.

McGowan is a cousin of Samuel Burns Jr., 17, who was shot to death in February 2000 outside a drug house in the 3500 block of N. 10th St. His killer remains unknown.

It is in this context that McGowan said he feels "blessed" to be alive and headed where he is today - to Casper College in Wyoming, where he says he has a scholarship to study theater.

His plan?

"To live life to the fullest - the right way," McGowan said after a performance at Heartlove Place, 3229 N. King Drive.

Too many of McGowan's peers are being robbed by gun violence of the opportunity to have the same prospects or perspective.

That's why McGowan and the other youths decided to join "T.A.G.," which stands for Teenagers Against Guns.

The initiative is part of the U.S. attorney office's Operation Ceasefire. It is funded through the program and Milwaukee Public Schools. The performers learn the art of theater through Theatre X.

The play is filled with a series of skits that emphasize the dangers of firearms. The background music is mostly hard-core rap.

A memorable line in the play is when a man, informed that 55 people had been killed in the city so far this year, nonchalantly replies: "That's not that many people. I can count to 55."

Throughout the play, the performers play the game of tag, bringing a playful mood to the set that belies the serious nature of the subject.

But its seriousness is brought back into focus by scenes such as the one in which McGowan lies in aasket as acquaintances mourn his death.

Appeared in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel on Aug. 14, 2002.



Photo Rick Wood

The play is filled with a series of skits that emphasize the dangers of firearms.

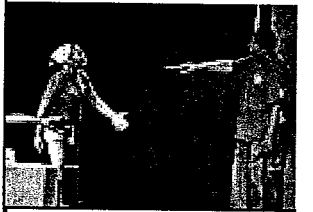


Photo Rick Wood

Actors perform a play called "T.A.G.—You're It" at the Heart Love Place, 3229 N. King Drive. T.A.G. stands for Teenagers Against Guns, and all of the performers have been directly affected by gun violence in real life.

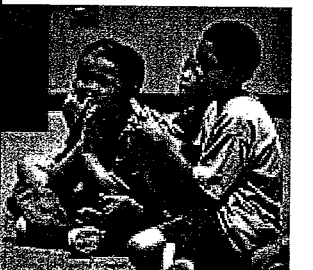


Photo Rick Wood

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