

# Gangs: Gwinnett investigator one of a kind

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head off potential problems, said Ross' supervisor, Maj. Carl Sims.

Roughly 8 percent of Gwinnett's 2,400 inmates have gang affiliations, Ross said. Gwinnett's jailers have identified members from about 30 to 40 gangs in Gwinnett's jail.

Most are in jail in ones and twos. The Northside 14 gang probably has the most members in Gwinnett's jail, with six or seven inmates, Ross said. Northside 14 is actually a loose federation of several other gangs, such as NRL 23 and the Latin Locos, Ross said.

"They had PL 14, but I think they got kicked out," Ross said. "I heard they're not allowed to wear red now?"

Ross gleaned information from inmates' letters about who's joining which gang and where folks are meeting. He keeps a file with odd tattoos, watching to see who comes in with similar markings. And he listens to inmates.

"It takes a unique individual," Sims said. "Most of what I've learned I learned [patrolling] the street. [Ross] doesn't come from that culture. ... After a while you start to pre-judge people, an us-against-them perspective. You can't do that. People sense your inner feelings about that."

Before he joined the Gwinnett Sheriff's Office six years ago, Ross, 28, worked retail security at department stores. Ross' earnest, self-effacing charm belies the seriousness of his new career.

"A good gang investigator is someone who under-



Roughly 8 percent of Gwinnett County's 2,400 inmates have gang affiliations, according to investigator Greg Ross.

stands what they're dealing with, that this is not a joke, or a fad or a passing fancy," Sims said.

Indeed, three of Gwinnett's cities have passed ordinances criminalizing some gang activities. The new laws make gang information more valuable to police, which may use the evidence in prosecutions.

But sorting through the gumbo of gangs' shifting alliances and rivalries can be complicated work, Ross said. Following it is like following a soap opera, he added. Except the actors don't like their audience very much.

As the tall officer from upstate New York walked into one cluster of jail cells, a reaction rippled visibly through the group of 30 or so inmates milling about on a recent afternoon. Prisoners tried to look at him without looking like they were looking. About half the prison-

ers left the room for the relative invisibility of the small enclosed yard.

Of course, gangsters generally don't introduce themselves as such to Ross, he said. Being a gang member is an aggravating factor in some crimes, potentially tacking on extra time to jail terms. And no one wants to look like a snitch in jail, he said.

Ross often refers to "security threat groups" when talking about gangs, using police-ese because of the legal implications of declaring someone a gang member.

"There's no fast-food, drive-thru way to tell" who is in a gang and who isn't, Ross said. "When it was big to wear white T-shirts, all of them were wearing white T-shirts. When it was big to wear pink, all of them were wearing pink."

For a time, Arizona Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner's red No. 13 jersey was big

among gang members, Ross said. The number 13 has some significance with gangs affiliated with the Mexican Mafia. But a guy in his 40s wearing the jersey at the mall isn't likely to get hassled, Ross said. His teenage nephew wearing baggy pants and tattoos with a hat on backward might, he said.

Ross will introduce himself when a prisoner is first admitted, he said. Ross asks, matter-of-factly, "I'll need to know for your benefit if you have tattoos, if you have a problem with someone on the street which can cause trouble here?" he said. He keeps his tone neutral. He speaks fluent Spanish, which helps him connect with Hispanic inmates. But if someone tells Ross that he has nothing to say, then that's that, Ross said.

Ross occasionally will try to talk to the relatives and friends visiting a gang member. But he has no power to compel a visitor to stop. And visitors are in shortage for some gang members. It's a harsh thing to realize for people who have bought into the blood-in, blood-out culture of gang as family, Ross said.

Much of identifying gang members comes down to sussing out attitudes, he said.

Knowing who knows who also helps. When it makes sense, he passes on important data to police investigators. "I'm a go-between for information you can't get to behind the walls," he said.

And that can help solve other crimes, Ross said. Particularly when the cops come looking for Squiggy.

# OBITUARIES

## AUSTELL



Valerie Daniel interpreted for the deaf as 20,000 marched in Atlanta in support of extending the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

# Valerie Daniel, 44, translated speeches into sign language

By KAY POWELL kpowell@ajc.com

Valerie Daniel was prepared to be sign language interpreter for the president of the United States if need be.

"She could do the president," said her mother, Catherine M. Watson of Austell. "We would watch him on television, and she would sit right here and sign every word he ever said. She said she was ready if they ever called her."

Miss Daniel, who had been signing since she was 7, kept her nails perfectly manicured with a clear or pearl polish and her monochromatic wardrobe at the ready so nothing detracted from a conversation with her hands.

"She was a hand person, so her hands always looked good," said her aunt Belinda Martin of Atlanta. "She was very articulate about her dress. She was to a T when it came to signing."

Otherwise, her flair for style was evident on her feet. "Everybody here knows her by 'Silly Shoes,'" said her co-worker at the State Bar of Georgia, Deborah Grant of Lithia Springs. "She wore very high heel shoes and a wide variety."

Since learning to sign at Wheat Street Baptist Church, Miss Daniel enrolled in every sign language class she learned about, her mother said.

"She loved working with her fingers," Ms. Watson said. "She thought it was so wonderful to talk to deaf people and talk to them with her hands."

The funeral for Valerie Renea Daniel, 44, of Austell is 11 a.m. today at Wheat Street Baptist Church. She died at Emory University Hospital Wednesday of complications following heart surgery. Sellers Bros. is in charge of arrangements.

Miss Daniel was the sign language interpreter for the Rev. Jesse Jackson's 2005 voting rights march in Atlanta that drew thousands of par-

ticipants. She regularly signed church worship services and graduation, baccalaureate services and other events at Clark Atlanta University. CAU has academic interpreters, but for one student, Miss Daniel mirrored all his other campus activities.

She was approached so often to sign for an event that she set up her own company this year charging a modest \$35 to \$75 a day, Ms. Watson said. "She didn't live on that," she said. "That was her hobby." Miss Daniel was a receptionist with the state bar and had worked as an interpreter at CAU.

"She was fascinating to watch," said Gay-linn E. Gatewood-Jasho of College Park, director of CAU's department for students with disabilities. "A lot had to do with her personality and movement."

"When she was interpreting music, her whole body moved with it. When you can actually see the interpreter in line with the rhythm, it brings it all together. I always appreciated that about Val. She had a lot of compassion and she was very passionate about signing."

In church, Ms. Grant said, she found herself looking at Miss Daniel signing more than she looked at the preacher.

Her pastimes were shopping and field trips for children, her mother said, adding, "She was a shopaholic. She goes to the 75 percent rack and she could stay there all day."

"She was a sharp dresser, even on casual day," Mrs. Gatewood-Jasho said.

Miss Daniel participated in the Upward Bound program at Morris Brown College, her mother said. "She would get a group of children and carry them anywhere they wanted to go."

With her signing, Miss Daniel bridged the gap between the hearing and the deaf. "Val, she was perfected at it," her aunt said.

Other survivors include her father, Tommy "Red" Daniel of Atlanta.

# Revolt: Legislature may convene itself

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"It's a question of whether the governor's actions rise to the need for a historic special session. I don't think the Senate is there yet."

However, senators were angered both by Perdue's May 30 veto of 41 bills and his decision to strike language put into the state's \$20.2 billion budget directing how money should be spent. By doing so, Perdue essentially told state agencies they can ignore the directions of lawmakers. Some legislators felt the move was an attempt to make the General Assembly powerless to decide how state money is spent.

## Balance of power at stake

"There are some larger issues that need to be addressed about the balance of power and the constitutional right of the Legislature to participate as an equal partner in the process," Johnson said. Ehrhart said calling a special session "is really the only avenue we have if we want to be relevant in the appropriations process as a Legislature."

Calling itself into a special session would be one of the greatest assertions of legislative power since the mid-1960s, when the General Assembly stripped the governor of his traditional practice of appointing committee chairmen and other leaders of the Legislature.

House and Senate leaders discussed several options last week, including notifying state agencies to follow their spending directives or waiting until the General Assembly reconvenes in January to vote to override some of Perdue's decisions.

The House has already shown a willingness to take on Perdue. It voted 163-5 on April 20 to override Perdue's veto of the midyear budget, a bill that included a \$142 million property tax break. Perdue later signed the budget but vetoed the tax cut.

Three-fifths of each chamber would have to sign a petition calling for a special session and present it to the governor's office. If the governor didn't call a session within three days, the Legislature could convene itself.

The idea didn't have much traction until Perdue's May 30 vetoes. He slashed \$130 million in spending using his line-item veto power. But he also redirected other spending that lawmakers approved, essentially giving agencies the funding but telling them to spend it the way he wanted.

For instance, lawmakers allocated \$1.59 million for a more than decade-old elementary school foreign language program. The money helps pay for teachers to teach foreign language in 29 elementary schools across the

state. When Perdue signed the budget, he directed the Department of Education to instead send each elementary school \$1,200 for foreign language materials, a move foreign language advocates say won't do much good.

The General Assembly approved \$150,000 to help plan the incorporation efforts of Chattahoochee Hill Country and the city of South Fulton. But Perdue directed the University System to "expend these funds in accordance with other priorities."

Legislators gave technical colleges an extra \$7.1 million to pay for instructors and other personnel. Perdue told the Department of Technical and Adult Education to use the money instead on minor repair and renovation projects at schools.

## Looking at revenue

House leaders are reticent to get out in front on the idea of a special session without support from the Senate because they were burned by the chamber when they overrode Perdue's tax cut veto.

However, news last week that state tax collections skyrocketed last month — leading to speculation that Perdue's administration cooked the books in April to justify vetoing the tax cut — only hardened the positions of some lawmakers.

Perdue used slow revenue

collections in April as one of his reasons for vetoing the tax cut. However, some lawmakers say the governor's administration manipulated the April figures by delaying the cashing of income tax checks. Income tax collections were down 24 percent in April over April 2006. They jumped 45 percent in May.

"If it were to come out that the revenue numbers were manipulated, I think it would affect the actions that the Senate took," Johnson said.

Sen. Doug Stoner of Smyrna, who said "the governor has exceeded his constitutional authority," was one of two Democrats who attended a breakfast meeting called by Johnson on St. Simons Island.

He said Democrats at one of the St. Simons Island meetings were asked what their caucus' position would be on a possible special session. Stoner said he doesn't know because the Democratic caucus hasn't discussed it. "I haven't made a decision yet," Stoner said. "I want to know what we're coming in to do. Until I see what that's going to be, I'm going to reserve judgment."

But he said lawmakers are so serious about the issue that many — if they do meet in Atlanta this summer in a special session — vowed to give up their daily expense money.

# DeKalb students to be introduced to algebra earlier

## Curriculum change affects seventh-graders per state guide

By KRISTINA TORRES ktorres@ajc.com

Former Superintendent Johnny Brown's tenure in DeKalb County was short-lived, not the least because of his sometimes controversial changes for schools here. Now, one of the last of those changes is going away.

System leaders said Monday night that they will drop eighth-grade algebra in the

face of a new state math curriculum that introduces the subject at an earlier grade. The course, usually taught in high school, had been required of every DeKalb eighth-grader since 2004.

"We're getting in compliance with the state [which put] everybody in Georgia on a level playing field," said DeKalb Deputy Superintendent Gloria Talley, who leads its instructional efforts. "The state is trying to push rigor down. They understand the urgency, particularly in the areas of mathematics and science."

Former schools leader Brown, hired in July 2002, included the requirement that DeKalb eighth-graders take an Algebra I course as part of

a slew of proposed high school reforms during his first year on the job.

Brown cited research that the course improved high school performance. At the time, it was the only element among his reforms that school board members approved. The other measures were revised and eventually adopted during his second year. Brown was forced out of his job in October 2004 after a series of clashes with the board.

But implementing the algebra course proved troublesome from the start. Teacher training was voluntary, and officials said there was a correlation between teachers who didn't take the training and those with the highest numbers of stu-

dents receiving poor grades. In some schools, large numbers of students who struggled in math were assigned to novice teachers.

More than two-thirds of DeKalb's eighth-graders subsequently failed the state's Algebra I End-of-Course Test, while 72 percent of the district's Algebra I teachers lacked high school certification.

Student performance appeared to improve since then, although not by much. In spring 2006, the last year for which results are available, 62 percent of DeKalb's eighth-graders failed the End-of-Course Test for Algebra I.

Current schools Superintendent Crawford Lewis is embracing revamped state

academic standards for math which follow the Japanese model of integrating topics, such as algebra, geometry and statistics, into single courses.

Under the new curriculum, for example, seventh-graders are learning algebra, geometry, statistics and probability. By the time students finish eighth grade, according to state officials, they should have completed 80 percent of Algebra I and 50 percent of geometry.

In other words, the new curriculum requires more of middle school students than ever before. First introduced two years ago, the math curriculum in middle and high school is being introduced one grade at a time. Eighth-graders will take it this coming school year.



As DeKalb County Schools superintendent from 2002-04, Johnny Brown proposed algebra be taught in eighth grade.