

Big expectations of neighbourhood task force

William Doyle-Marshall

There are high expectations of the recently announced Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force from the African Canadian community.

Former Human Rights Commissioner and community activist Bromley Armstrong says the move is a step in the right direction and Reverend Don Butler, pastor of Anglican Church of the Nativity expects opportunities for those who are disenfranchised.

Two members from the African Canadian community are on the 25-member Task Force. They are Ron Rock, executive director of the East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club and Harold Brathwaite, senior advisor to the President of Seneca College.

United Way of Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto launched the initiative in response to the work of the Toronto City Summit Alliance which identified the importance of strong and healthy neighbourhoods in its report "Enough Talk". Three levels of government are supporting the Task Force project with funding and senior staff who will play key roles.

Belinda Brady, a young music producer and entertainer expects strength and consistency from the initiative so that the current crime rate will decrease. One reason for crime, Brady believes, is that people are unemployed. Production coordinator at CHRY Radio, she says citizens need to be informed about the opportunities that exist in their communities.

"If they are going to be serious about this, it has to

be a long term thing. A lot of damage has been done. The system really has to work," she says.

To make Toronto a better place, Armstrong wants homeless people moved off the streets and put in homes. Working people must be able to earn a living and not merely survive on the poverty line. The former trade unionist is disturbed that so many parents do two and three jobs. People should be able to work one job and be able to look after their families. Because of this unacceptable working situation, many constantly have no time for their children.

Reverend Butler's primary focus is the youth and finding opportunities for them. Redirecting their energies in positive ways is part of a stronger city, the clergyman contends. "It seems as though most of the concerns we hear about in the media deal with youth and we don't seem to have an effective way to use their energies," he said.

Recently, police, administrators and others in the greater Toronto area have been expressing concerns about social conditions in the city.

"We want to get the businesses, the three levels (federal, provincial and municipal) of government and the social service sector to seriously look at building strong neighbourhoods," says Rock, who has a strong background in community development from his youthful days in Montreal, Quebec.

The former City of Toronto employee is concerned that if the Task Force doesn't develop a long-term

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plan for communities Toronto will end up in decay. He fears when communities decay, there is a flight of industries as well.

Some of the natural consequences are increased poverty and declining business opportunities as entrepreneurs shy away from troubled communities. "If we do not have the skills set that is important to invest in edu-

cation, massive decay is inevitable," the administrator concluded.

The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force is charged with the responsibility of building an action plan for strong neighbourhoods in Toronto, identifying community investment models that will leverage and coordinate resources from all three levels of government and advocate for change.