

Super Bowl: Where will the homeless go?

By Bankole Thompson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

DETROIT (NNPA) - As Sunday's Super Bowl draws near, some elected officials and homeless advocates are concerned about the fate of the city's homeless population in days leading up to the event, which is expected to draw tens of thousands to Detroit this weekend.

Detroit city council member Kwame Kenyatta said at a recent council session he was concerned about the announcement that homeless people were being rounded up during the Super Bowl events.

"I hope we don't just round them up so folks don't think there is no homelessness in Detroit," Kenyatta said.

Kandia Milton, Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's council liaison, said the administration is putting together a plan to avert mistakes made in other cities where homeless people were arrested at the Super Bowl.

Dr. Calvin Trent, head of the city's bureau of substance abuse treatment and recovery, leads the team catering to the homeless during the Super Bowl.

"What has happened in the past in other cities where the Super Bowl took place is that there were negative consequences for people who were homeless or where there are a lot of poor people," Trent said.

"We are concerned that we don't cause any negative effects on the homeless and those with mental challenges."

Trent said Detroit will avoid anything like the incident in Jacksonville, Fla., that led to some lawsuits

against that city last year.

According to an Associated Press report three homeless men in Jacksonville — Michael Robert Johnson, Christopher Lee Nelson and Thomas Worley — were arrested in 2004 on charges of drinking in a public park.

The Treaty Oak Park, where they were arrested, had been designated a party zone before the Feb. 6, 2005, Super Bowl event.

Assistant Public Defender Tyler McKinney argued in court that if "the rich, powerful and famous can drink in the park in the weeks before the Super Bowl, why can't the homeless do it now?"

The park was inside a 21/2-mile entertainment zone adopted by the Jacksonville city council in May of 2004.

Laws against open containers, noise pollution and outdoor alcohol sales were suspended for 18 days before the Super Bowl, the Associated Press reported.

The National Football League requires entertainment zones in host cities in the weeks leading to its championship game to broaden the Super Bowl festive mood.

McKinney said the zone benefits those attending the Super Bowl festivities, but it can be manipulated to discriminate against the poor. In Detroit, Trent said he is working with a coalition of homeless organizations and shelters to provide some events for the homeless.

"We are in discussion with some folks at the shelters and some of them have decided they would stay open the whole day on the day of the Super Bowl," Trent said. "We will have some special events for them to access the

Super Bowl."

Trent said part of the plan will be to offer Detroit Police Department some hotline numbers to call when they encounter homeless people near the downtown area during the event.

"Should the police run into somebody who needed mental health service we want to come out and service them," Trent said, instead of arresting them. "So this crisis intervention program would be something we will continue after the event. In a

way, it is causing us to expand services."

Ronald Riggs, unity director for Neighborhood Service Organization's 24-hour center, said a poll that was recently taken by his group showed a majority of the homeless served by their program want to take part in the Super Bowl events.

"Some of our clients have never been to the Ford Field and the game," Riggs said. "I'm part of a group that wants to take the homeless to the stadium."

Riggs said the plan for the homeless is security issue that has taken on a life of its own.

"This is an international event," Riggs said. "My understanding is that there is a certain area in the Ford Field where even if the mayor goes he will be arrested. That's a joke."

He said the mobile response team, which will provide to service homeless people and the mentally ill, will reduce the number of arrests.

"Addressing this issue is part of the city's ten year plan to eradicate chronic homelessness," Trent said. "We truly believe the way a community deals with its least disadvantaged people is a good key indicator of the type of community we have."

Stacie Clayton, Super Bowl host committee vice president for public affairs said the committee will contribute to the plan being developed.

Bankole Thompson writes for the Michigan Citizen.

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Ali honored for charity at World Economic Forum

DAVOS, Switzerland (AP) - Muhammad Ali was honored at the World Economic Forum for his efforts to promote dialogue and understanding between the Muslim and Western worlds. Accompanied by his wife, Yolanda, Ali received the first-ever prize from the Council of 100 Leaders, a group formed at the forum's annual meeting two years ago to promote understanding between the West and Muslims.

Britain's former archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey of Clifton, who is on the Council of 100, recalled Ali's boxing career and his public acknowledgment of having Parkinson's Disease.

"Who among us was not stirred and moved ...as he lit the flame at the start of the 1996 Olympic games in Atlanta?" he asked. And as he repeated the boxer's famous mantra — "I float like a butterfly and sting like a bee!" Ali lashed out with a quick left jab. His wife, Yolanda, gave a speech to accept the award as Ali sat back down Saturday.

"Even though his voice is silent," she said, choking back tears, "dialogue is not always verbal. Sometimes it's about gestures, interaction."

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