

Needed: A sponsor for peace



Monica
Yant Kinney

Whenever I write about Philadelphia's homicide crisis, I hear from suburban readers who think it's a waste of space. Poor black people killing poor black people, thugs shooting thugs — why should we cry?

With alarming regularity, folks living outside the city suggest they'd rather ignore the horrors inside it.

Then there is Frank Baseman.

The Jenkintown graphic designer is obsessed with the death toll — already over 200 —

even though the bullets aren't flying anywhere near the home and family he holds dear.

So he turned on the computer.

Imagine the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Only instead of a wall honoring war casualties, he made a poster remembering the 406 people killed in Philadelphia in 2006.

From top to bottom, their names, ages, races and manners of death jump off the page, done in blood-red for the bloodshed.

In the middle of this memori-

al? A gun, since nearly all of them died because of one.

(Last year's homicide-by-gun rate was 85 percent; this year, it's approaching 90 percent.)

"I'm not so foolish to think that this poster is going to convince someone to say, 'Oh, I'll put my gun away and not blow this person's head off,'" said Baseman, 48, who owns his own firm and did the poster in his spare time.

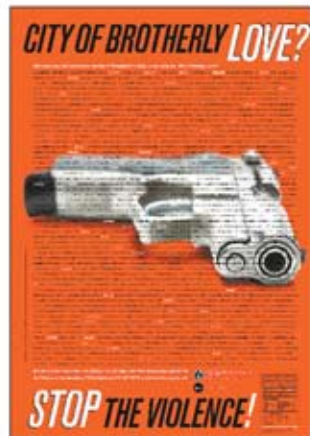
But he was naive enough to think others inside the city would care as much as one out-

sider does.

Even after he teamed up with the Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia (AVP), not a single dollar has been raised to get the public-service announcement installed in bus shelters all over town.

"It's been a difficult sell," explained AVP's executive director, Julie Rausch. "Many organizations don't want to have their names and reputations associated with the 'stigma' of homicide."

See **POSTER** on B4



Like the Vietnam War Memorial, this poster lists victims — of homicides.

A message of peace begs for a sponsor

POSTER from B1 Staring down the barrel

The most provocative poster you've never seen has evolved over the last seven months.

Version 1.0 targeted Philly-based Urban Outfitters for selling \$6 handgun Christmas ornaments in a city ravaged by bullets. Then Baseman remembered: Toy guns aren't the problem.

He needed a real weapon. So Baseman tapped photographer and fellow Philadelphia University professor Todd Vachon and, with Rausch's help, set up a photo shoot.

A homicide detective brought two guns: a Glock carried by cops and a 9mm commonly seen on the street.

"I wouldn't shoot the Glock," Baseman said. I wanted a gun the bad guys would use."

Studying the weapon from all angles, he settled on a design with the handle blurred and the barrel in bold, cold focus.

"I didn't want to glorify the gun," he explained. "This way, it looks more menacing."

The dead in B&W

Baseman sees bus shelters as outdoor information stations where powerful messages can grab the masses while they wait.

"At 4-foot-by-6-foot," he said, "that gun is going to be huge."

Even the fine print will be big enough for people on the street to scan the list for lost loved ones.

Victims are color-coded by race. Asians are identified separately by police, but Hispanics are not.

Rausch knows that will pro-

voke controversy. So will the predominance of black text, more evidence that homicide is what she calls "an epidemic" in the African American community.

"Some of our staff said the white names stand out," she admitted, "like they're more important."

Whether anyone else will be similarly shaken by the blunt facts of death depends on whether the posters ever get hung.

Rausch said Clear Channel agreed to display the posters at cost, which means AVP needs to raise \$1,000 to hang 10 or \$10,000 for 100. (For maximum impact, Baseman would love to see 500 or 1,000 go up for three months.)

"We asked businesses with an urban market, whose customers are being affected by violence," Rausch said. "No

one was interested."

Baseman realizes the posters are "not a feel-good thing," but that's why they need to be seen.

"Homicide is a loaded topic. It's not pretty. It's not pleasant."

And whether you're living comfortably in the suburbs or fighting to stay alive in the city, it's too ugly to ignore anymore.

Contact Monica Yant Kinney at myant@phillynews.com or 215-854-4670. To view interactive homicide maps and coverage, go to <http://go.philly.com/violence>.

For information on the poster, or free services for families of homicide victims, contact the Anti-Violence Partnership of Philadelphia at 215-567-6776 or www.avpphila.org