
DORCHESTER

Residents question the Hiram Grand Lodge's 'youth development center' status

Posted by Cara Bayles

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By Cara Bayles, Town Correspondent

In 2008, Breath of Life Dorchester was planning a fund-raiser to celebrate the Codman Square activist group's 10 years of existence.

They approached the Hiram Grand Lodge Youth Development Center, a large space on Talbot Avenue, to ask if they'd host their event, and were told the group preferred not to host events with teenagers, because they always got out of hand.

The sentiment stung, since the BOLD teens work to combat such images of neighborhood teenagers, focusing their efforts on such accomplishments as helping federal regulators develop more graphic cigarette warning labels, improving relations between the neighborhood's teens and Boston Police, and several environmental and public health education campaigns in Dorchester.

"It's a slap in the face to the young people here, who are doing positive things in their community every single day," said Nebulla Stephen, who was the BOLD teens' coordinator at the time. "It's an absolute fraud."

Neighbors have also expressed concern about the chain link fence laced with barbed wire around the building, and wondered why the group calls the building a "youth development center" if they wouldn't allow a group of young activists, joined by local politicians and other adults, to rent the space for a silent auction.

"I have to tell you, we've had to have police come in to stop fights between kids. I'm just telling you what our experience has been. Some adults who bring the kids let them do whatever they want. It's one o'clock in the morning and they say, 'bring me another beer.' We've been through it," said John Carrington, the lodge's former grandmaster, during a meeting with the Codman Square Neighborhood Council, which had invited representatives from the Hiram Grand Lodge to their meetings since the 2008 incident.

Carrington said the masons are "devoted to education, charity, and family values," and explained that the volunteer organization did host birthday parties for younger children, and benefited youth in other ways, citing four annual scholarships and \$10,000 in charitable donations to the Home for Little Wanderers. The building is also used for meetings and training sessions for the masons. Carrington added that the barbed wire kept down incidents of theft and graffiti.

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