

TROUBLES AT AFTER-HOURS CLUBS GROW - CRACKDOWN ASIDE, KILLINGS CONTINUE

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Two people were shot to death at a Detroit after-hours club this weekend, nine months after a famous rapper and an Army veteran were killed in a blaze of gunfire and authorities promised a crackdown on after-hours establishments.

This weekend's shootings highlighted the city's ongoing problem with illegal clubs - a problem police say is growing and one that Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy pledged to attack last April after two men - including rap star Proof - were gunned down at a since-padlocked club on 8 Mile.

Whether that promise has been kept, however, is unclear: On Monday, two days after two men were killed at the Social Club in the 12000 block of Dexter, Worthy's office declined to say how many illegal clubs it has pursued shutting down since her announcement.

The two men killed about 5 a.m. Saturday were identified Monday as 28-year-old Kevin Johnson and 33-year-old Angelo Brandon.

Johnson, who was shot in the head, was found in the club's bathroom, police said. Brandon's body was found on the sidewalk outside with a gunshot wound to the chest.

Police said it wasn't clear whether the same shooter killed both men, who were dead on arrival Saturday morning at Henry Ford Hospital.

No one has been arrested in the killings.

Police spokesman James Tate said the club didn't produce the proper licenses or permits to be open at any hour, much less past 2 a.m. - the hour at which licensed bars are required to stop serving alcohol and begin shooping patrons out the door.

"We have reason to believe prostitution was taking place at this social club, and other illegal activities," Tate said. "There was liquor on the premises and topless dancing."

Michigan business records show no listing for a Social Club on Dexter, but a business dubbed the B.D.L. Group is listed at the same address. Hermell Whouie of Detroit, who is named as a contact for the establishment, couldn't be reached Monday.

The deaths are not the only ones recently at an after-hours club in Detroit. On Dec. 8, police said, a 17-year-old was killed at Club Elite, which was operating illegally on the city's northeast side. Tate said 24 people either were arrested or cited at the club. No one has been charged in the killing.

Detroit's longstanding problem with after-hours clubs came under attack after the shooting at the C.C.C. club in April, when police say Proof, whose birth name was Deshaun Holton, shot and killed Keith Bender Jr., 35, and then was shot to death by Bender's cousin, Mario Etheridge. Etheridge was later convicted of carrying a concealed weapon and discharging a firearm. He was sentenced to time served.

Worthy was granted a court order to shut down the C.C.C. club for a year and announced a crackdown on illegal after-hour clubs, saying she was forming a team of six prosecutors to focus on violators.

Authorities said there were at least 100 such clubs in Wayne County, and last May, a joint report by the Free Press and Local 4 found three clubs serving alcohol illegally over a three-night span.

On Monday, Worthy's spokeswoman, Maria Miller, said the prosecutor's office "has been actively involved" with police in closing down after-hours establishments, but she declined to elaborate.

Tate said city police have closed eight illegal clubs since late October, acting on residents' complaints.

"We doubled back to check to make sure they were still closed, and they were," he said, adding that police haven't received any more complaints from residents near those halls.

He also said more illegal clubs seem to have opened in the city in recent months.

In December, Detroit police arrested a Detroit man accused of spraying an after-hours club with bullets from an AK47 assault rifle in September 2005, killing two people and injuring six. **Samuel Bridges**, 27, was on the state's most-wanted list before his arrest in Harper Woods.

Police say clubs opened illegally tend to invite a slew of illegal activities - including prostitution, liquor violations and drug sales. They also are the sites of numerous nonfatal shootings, Tate said.

"It's very important that we shut these places down," he said.

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MEMO: CORRECTION RAN JANUARY 16, 2007

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Correction: A Jan. 9 article in the Local section about two people being killed at an after-hours club incorrectly said the club had the same address as a business called B.D.L. Group, with a contact name of Hermell Whouie. B.D.L. Group is at a different address on the street.

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