

Gangs are us

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Tonight's "Us vs. Them" town meeting in Stroudsburg grows out of years — decades, really — of friction between long-time Pocono residents and tourists and new residents.

It's the second community interest program this week. Sponsored by the Pocono Record, the Pennsylvania Cable Network and the Pennsylvania Newspaper Association, "Us vs. Them" comes just two days after public school and law enforcement officials put on their own forum at Stroudsburg Area Junior High School for educators: a gang awareness seminar.

Does anyone see a connection?

Gang members use the us vs. them mentality to attract gullible recruits and foster antisocial — or worse — attitudes and activities. And joining a gang can happen easily. After all, many a typical teenager is already on a natural biological and emotional journey of separation from parents, on a mission to define himself or herself as a distinct individual. The teen years, filled with a growing awareness of self and fueled by raging hormones, provide fertile ground for those who make it their business to cultivate bad attitudes and behavior.

The Monroe County Drug Task Force, the county District Attorney's Office, Stroudsburg Area School District and the county Correctional Facility all presented tips Tuesday on recognizing and addressing gang activity. They warned that local school-age children and teens who go unsupervised are easy targets for gang recruiters. Many of these kids belong to families whose parents commute to work out of state in an effort to keep house and home together.

Participants in Tuesday's gang awareness program are keenly aware of the need to raise public awareness of the signs of gang activity and to encourage public discussion of ways to combat it. Likewise, tonight's town meeting, which PCN will televise, offers a chance for the entire Pocono community to discuss the age-old human condition of "us vs. them" — which gangs epitomize — and share ways this dynamic community can grow in a positive way.

The Pocono Record salutes the many concerned individuals who put together the gang awareness program and commends their efforts on behalf of our young people and the community. And we invite the public to "Us vs. Them: Why Can't We All Get Along?" at 7 tonight at the Sherman Theater on Main Street. Let's explore the roots of regional and cultural animosity and try to understand one other rather than indulging in chronic fault-finding that can lead to needless polarization. This growing community has the talent and the wisdom to transform "us" and "them" to "we."