

## Hate groups' new target: Hispanics

*As immigrant populations grow, crimes against them rise but may go unreported*

By **BILL POOVEY**

CHATTANOOGA - Organized hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan have historically terrorized blacks and Jews in the Southeast. But the recent influx of Hispanic immigrants to the region has given hate groups a new target, and officials say Hispanics are increasingly targets of hate crimes.

Former Klansman Daniel Schertz, a 27-year-old from the southeast Tennessee town of South Pittsburg, was indicted in June on charges of building pipe bombs to kill Hispanic immigrants.

Imperial Wizard Billy Jeffery of the North Georgia White Knights denied any connection to the bomb plot and said he banished Schertz from the group, but he readily admits he isn't happy with the flow of immigrants to the region.

"The blacks fought for their civil rights. These illegal immigrants are coming in here and having everything just handed to them," Jeffery said.

Advocates say there are no precise statistics on hate crimes against Hispanics. Victims don't always call the police because of their precarious immigration status.

"People feel they will not be protected, and they are risking deportation," said John Bernstein, director of federal policy at the National Immigration Law Center in Washington. "That is more and more a problem with hate crimes."

Hate crimes against Hispanic immigrants have been common in other parts of the country, but Southern states saw their Hispanic populations boom in the 1990s. Tennessee's Hispanic population rose by 278 percent during the decade, Arkansas' by 337 percent, Georgia's by 300 percent and South Carolina's by 211 percent.

Santos Aguilar of the Alianza Del Pueblo, an advocacy center for immigrants in Knoxville, said he believes the number of hate groups taking aim at immigrants continues to grow.

"The majority of the crimes are not reported to the law enforcement agencies," he said.

Immigrant Hispanics - and their employers - are also being targeted by organizations for economic reasons.

In East Tennessee, a group calling itself the Tennessee Volunteer Minutemen based in Hamblen County wants to report area employers that hire illegal immigrants to the U.S. government.

One of the first signs of organized anti-Hispanic activity by a hate group in the South occurred in Gainesville, Ga., in 1998, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, an Alabama group that tracks hate crimes.

The American Knights of the KKK held a rally on Hall County Courthouse steps, followed by a cross-burning in nearby Winder. A few years later, in 2001, the nation's largest neo-nazi organization, the National Alliance, staged a rally in Hall County.

While a member of the North Georgia White Knights, Schertz was caught by an undercover federal agent and a confidential informant. Court records show he took them shopping for bomb materials at a home improvement store.

"Once at Lowe's, Schertz picked out five end caps and some silicone for the pipe bombs he was making," the agent's affidavit says. He then explained how to wire the explosives.

After returning to a shed at his home, Schertz gave instructions "down to the proper order of laying gun powder and shrapnel material." He made five pipe bombs and sold them for \$750, records show.

Schertz is charged with teaching and demonstrating how to make a weapon of mass destruction and interstate transport of explosive material with intent to kill or injure. He is being held without bond.

Schertz's attorney, Mike Caputo, declined to comment on the charges but said he was working on a plea agreement. He said Schertz is a military veteran and has no previous criminal record.

His Klan leader, Jeffery, said Schertz was thrown out of the Klan for unrelated disobedience in mid-May - weeks after the alleged bomb making and selling in April.

"We kicked him out for breaking his oath that he swore before God," Jeffery, 43, said in a telephone interview. "We are not a violence-making group, and we don't believe in that. This isn't the '50s and '60s."

Federal agents say hate groups always deny involvement when one of their members is charged with a crime.

"There are always a percentage of these people who are ready, willing and able to go off," said **James M. Cavanaugh, special agent in charge of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Nashville field division.**

Cavanaugh said that "when the group burns the cross, worships under the swastika, you dehumanize the people. ... That has been a plague on the world for centuries."

The Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Report counted 762 active hate groups in the United States in 2004. South Carolina had the most, with 47, and Tennessee had the most Klan chapters, with 13.

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David Lubell, director of the Nashville-based Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, said the Schertz case shows how supremacist talk can prompt violence.

"It is what happened in the civil rights movement. All of a sudden it is acceptable to incite hatred of immigrants, whether Latino or from Africa or Asia or wherever," he said.

Lubell said "usually it is a lone wolf kind of person who listens to these messages and acts on them. ... This is just a symptom of what has been anti-immigrant sentiment, much more freely used by radio talk-show hosts, anti-immigrant groups and even politicians."