

WIS10-TV (Columbia, SC)

Leaders Don't See "Hate Crimes" as County-Wide Problem

By Jack Kuenzie

(Clarendon County, SC) July 11, 2006 – They call him Fred, as in the Redd Foxx character from "Sanford and Son."

But James "Fred" Baker is a real life junk dealer.

And after 13 years in business in Summerton, Baker knows the town and Clarendon County as well as anyone.

"White and Blacks get along good here. I don't see no problem," says Baker.

Dwight Stewart agrees. He's chairman of the Clarendon County Council.

"I think as long as they're differences in us, there will always be cases of prejudice, but I think by and large ... Clarendon County has a good record," says Stewart.

The race issue comes up after the arrests of Jeremy Sweat and Dustin Evans. They are two white men accused of kidnapping and raping two black women.

One of the alleged victims is a 15-year-old, who investigators say was repeatedly stabbed.

County investigators say the attacks are "hate crimes," noting Sweat has expressed sympathy for the Ku Klux Klan.

The head of the NAACP in Manning calls the crimes 'senseless,' but Bobby Fleming told us by phone he also sees no sign that the attacks are part of a larger race problem in Clarendon County.

Baker says the county has made progress after making headlines in 1995 for a series of Black church burnings. Two in particular in Clarendon and Williamsburg Counties brought then-President Bill Clinton to Greelyville.

Three years later there was a highly publicized trial. A Clarendon jury slapped the KKK with a \$38 million judgment.

"We have not seen any overt activity [with the KKK]," says Stewart.

Baker and others say the criminal rampage attributed to Sweat and Evans is completely contrary to the way people here live today.

"This is South Carolina ... it is in the South, but it isn't like the Old South," Baker says.

Copyright © 2000-2006 WorldNow and WISTV, a Raycom Media Station.