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'Tragedy' illustrates area's struggles

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CEDAR RAPIDS - The killing of Willie Junior Brocks is the fourth homicide in the city this year and third in the Wellington Heights neighborhood, an area struggling against negative public perception. Brocks' body was found by police Saturday morning in front of a residence in the 400 block of 15th Street SE. (See story on page 1A.)

Russ Oviatt, president of the neighborhood association that has led efforts to revitalize the area, called Brocks' death a "tragedy" that illustrates the area's need for more attention from the police and social service agencies.

"That's not to say that extra police patrols could have prevented this," Oviatt said. "I don't know if they could have."

Other murders in the southeast-side neighborhood this year include that of Judith Weeks, 44, whose partially clothed body was found by a passer-by behind a vacant apartment house at 1319 Second Ave. SE on April 5. Weeks' death remains under investigation. On May 10, Jamar Magett, 19, a native of Chicago, was fatally shot in the forehead and chest in the 1400 block of Fifth Avenue SE. Paul Gilbert, 18, of Cedar Rapids, was charged with the killing but was found not guilty by a Linn County jury in September.

Obviously, the neighborhood killings have hurt the morale of area residents, Oviatt said.

"A lot of them are very frustrated," he said. "There's a lot of great people in this neighborhood who are trying to increase their quality of life. When something like this happens, it seems to set us back - both in public perception and morale."

The fourth Cedar Rapids murder of 1999 was committed in June. Weldon Ellingson, 79, apparently shot his stepdaughter Marilyn Freestone, 58, before killing himself. The murder-suicide occurred in the home they shared at 1836 C Ave. NE.