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**Man combats violence
with area crime watch**

By Brian R. Ballou

GLOBE STAFF

Spring was inching toward summer, and the children of Wendover Street were taking advantage of the clear skies and warm weather by turning the street into their own playground. Some tossed a football, while others rode on scooters or bicycles or played hide-and-seek among the bushes. And the playful sounds of youth carried through Franklin Miller's two-story house.

"That was one of the first times I've heard kids playing on the streets since I moved here," said Miller, a wide smile on his face. "It was beautiful, because usually when the good weather comes, you just hear the sounds of dudes fixing cars, gambling, and loud music. No kids' voices."

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borhood for 11 years — sat in a circle. The residents said their calls to police often go unanswered. Pires encouraged them to keep calling.

Alex Mendes, 24, was shot to death on Wendover Street on May 6, not far from the intersection where his brother, Bobby, was stabbed to death in 1995.

Since Jan. 1, 2005, there have been two stabbings, one nonfatal shooting, six reports of shots fired, and the Mendes homicide on Wendover Street, according to Boston police statistics.

"It's a constant struggle, but you just can't give up," said Miller, 34, who grew up in a crime-ridden area in Newark. "That was one of the saddest events I've ever witnessed, considering Isaura and everything she's done. We were able to mobilize people after that."

Following the slaying in May, Miller and other residents persuaded city officials to change the flow of traffic on Wendover Street, making it a one-way street flowing onto Dudley Street, and to put up a 12-foot chain-link fence around a grassy lot. Those two changes cut down on speedy traffic and loitering that made residents wary of walking down their street. Then last month, Miller, a youth and community organizer for the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation, put together a neighborhood block party, setting up a grill on Wendover Street in front of his house.

"I know he's really trying," Mendes said. "To have someone like him work in to make the community better, it's nice."

Residents of Wendover have

But by the end of that first week last May, the children's voices were replaced by sobs from adults who had witnessed another fatal shooting on the street. "That really caught us off guard," said Miller, who was named Crimefighter of the Year by the Boston Police Department and Mayor Thomas M. Menino on Aug. 1.

Miller and others in the neighborhood knew they had to take action after the death of Alex Mendes, the son of Isaura Mendes, a nearby resident and well-known community activist in the Uphams Corner section of Dorchester. Miller, who helped establish a neighborhood watch when he moved to Wendover Street in 2002, called an emergency meeting. In his small living room upstairs overlooking the street, more than a dozen residents and three Boston police officers — including Miguelangelo Pires, a community service officer who has patrolled the neigh-

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been caught in a battleground in recent years between two groups of Cape Verdeans, said Acting Commissioner Albert E. Goslin.

"It's no secret there are a couple of Cape Verdean entities feuding with each other, and Wendover became one of the spots where that has played out," Goslin said. "But Franklin, he was smart enough to make a quick assessment of the neighborhood when he moved in, and he found people who wanted to stay in the neighborhood and he pulled them together. He is a huge asset, and the message he and other residents are sending gets out among the gangbangers and trouble makers."

Ann Fernandes, whose 16-year-old son, Chris Resende, was shot to death six summers ago during a sweet 16 birthday party on Magnolia Street, said Miller's ability to unify residents is what has sparked a turnaround on the street.

"He's so valuable to us because he works hard and he speaks up when there is a problem on the street," said Fernandes, 46, who has lived on Wendover Street for 16 years.

She has hosted the last three monthly watch meetings at her house, directly across from Miller's residence.

Pires said: "Kids out here use intimidation, and a lot of people don't stand up because of that. But Franklin has been a strong leader, and he's created a strong watch here that won't be intimidated."

Miller, who has two children, said he was warned by friends not to move to Wendover Street because of the crime there.

"The city is the city, and every rose has its thorn," he said.