

# Hero' clad in gangsta threads

Distinctive Mill Woods duds sending mixed message?

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BY BROOKES MERRITT, SUN MEDIA

Tired of being branded Edmonton's roughest 'gangsta' neighbourhood, residents of Mill Woods may have found a saviour in Kaylan Berry.

The 27-year-old is the man behind the Millwoods Hero clothing line: thug-themed hoodies, ball caps, booty shorts and shirts that appeal to young gangster wannabes but target neighbourhood pride rather than punk petulance.

According to Berry's website - winterstudios.ca - a Millwoods Hero is "a person noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose."

But Mill Woods residents disturbed by the number of southside youth claiming to live the thug life have a problem with the online Hero models, who are posed as if brandishing weapons.

One picture shows a male model brandishing a soda pop gun from behind a bar as though it were a weapon, In another, a man's face is covered by a kerchief, his fingers splayed in a gangster-style gesture.

The pictures are an obvious satire, says Berry.

"The clothing line takes that stigma of violence and turns it on its head. Criminals are no more likely to buy my camouflage hoodies than any other similarly styled fashion.

"The point is to soften a traditionally negative image by pairing gangster style with a logo of neighbourhood pride."

A graphic designer whose clients include a high profile Edmonton radio station, Berry came up with the idea for Millwoods Hero to defend his lifelong neighbourhood from its bad rap.

His clothes range in price from \$20 for hats to \$80 for hoodies.

"The notion it's more violent here is disheartening and unfounded.

"Yes, there are rough places, and my friends have commented that their younger brothers have it harder than they did growing up.

"But every place in the city is like that. I'm just taking advantage of a style trend and adding a local spin to it."

Police crime statistics show that per capita, Mill Woods is no more dangerous than any other neighbourhood in Edmonton.

"The line has really taken off. I'm selling hundreds of items now, and I think most people buy the stuff because they realize it's satirical," Berry said.

But Mill Woods Crime Prevention Council spokesman Amarjeet Sohi says the clothing line sends a mixed message.

"Anything that enhances our community image is positive, but (Berry's) message may be lost in the gangster style he uses to market his product."

Sohi agreed the style will likely be profitable given today's trends in youth fashion.

"But there are better ways to promote Mill Woods.

"The majority of kids here are great, but the real role models are the kids working within the community to help one another, and to shape the future of their peers."

photo by Brett Gundlock, Special to the Sun

Kaylan Berry, owner of Millwoods Hero clothing company, poses with some of his product at his home yesterday. Berry created the clothing line to encourage neighbourhood pride in the southeast Edmonton community.

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