

ORANGE COUNTY

Fighting Hate Crimes 24 Hours a Day

■ **Social issues:** Aims of new hotline service are to help in the reporting of incidents, raise awareness.

By JEFF KASS
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

SANTA ANA—In his desk drawer, Orange County Human Relations Commission worker Eli Reyna keeps a note of thanks from the victim of a hate crime who lay in the hospital after being stabbed 27 times.

For Reyna, the note is a reminder of the need to prevent hate crimes—a goal he and others on the Human Relations Commission hope will receive a boost today with the opening of a 24-hour, toll-free hotline to report such crimes and raise awareness.

"We've got to do more than just communicate this message" of tolerance, said the commission's executive director, Rusty Kennedy, of the need for a hotline. "But give people an opportunity to act upon their heightened awareness."

In addition to reporting hate crimes, members of the public may volunteer their time, make donations and request information on promoting tolerance via the hotline.

The announcement comes days after an Asian American councilman

in Garden Grove found a swastika painted on a campaign sign.

The hotline has been in the planning stages for the past year, said Kennedy.

While the number of reported hate crimes and hate "incidents" in Orange County has remained steady at about 180 a year for the past four years, Kennedy hopes to reduce that statistic.

"One [hate crime] is too many," he said. "If we stand on the sidelines saying nothing, then it can only grow."

Hate crimes, Kennedy said, carry legal consequences, while hate incidents, such as using racial slurs, may be protected as free speech. Either way, he said, "it's something we want to know about."

From 114 reported hate crimes and incidents in Orange County in 1991, the number has risen to about 180 a year since 1992—a spike Kennedy attributed to increased awareness about such crimes.

In 1995, the commission reported 175 incidents, with the largest number, 44, directed at blacks.

The hotline is the centerpiece of "Something's Got to Give," the commission's emerging public relations campaign to prevent hate crimes. The campaign will include posters at bus stops and inside Orange County Transportation Authority buses and newspaper ads. Posters and fliers also will be distributed to schools,

churches and libraries.

The poster shows a rope frayed to the breaking point and held together by a slim thread. A caption reads: "The violence that comes from hatred and misunderstanding won't stop until everyone reaches out and lends a hand. . . . Something's got to give. And it begins with you."

James Colquitt, former president of the Orange County chapter of the NAACP, said he supported the hotline as an educational tool and as a way for the commission to get more information on hate crimes.

He also said the hotline may be an alternative to calling the police.

A commission employee will answer the hotline from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays. After hours, people can leave messages. Callers may remain anonymous.

The hotline number is (888) NO-2-HATE.