

Scouts Post Apology for 'Slave Sale'

A Reston Boy Scout Explorer troop has posted a public apology on a window of the new town's Lake Anne Hall after complaints from some black residents about the troop's plan to raise money by having a "slave sale."

Under the original plan—called off after a protest meeting of about 100 people—25 members of the all-white troop were to be publicly auctioned to perform such chores for the highest bidder as baby-sitting, car washing and housework.

The money they earned as "slaves" would have been used for a planned trip to Disneyworld next Christmas.

"They didn't intend any affront...(and) everything was amicable at the end...it was an example of insensitivity to black people and how they feel about slavery," remarked Eli Blake, a cofounder of Reston's Black Focus, a group concerned with promoting black involvement in the community.

Blake said yesterday that when the Reston Times, a weekly newspaper, first carried an ad about the planned Saturday noon "slave sale," several people objected to the idea and called on the troop leaders to cancel it.

See RESTON, C6, Col. 8

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RESTON. From C1

The leaders, Douglas Gunter and Steve McIntire, who could not be reached for comment yesterday, suggested changing the title to something like "rent-a-kid," but there still were strong objections to the concept of auctioning off people, Blake said.

As a result, about 100 blacks and whites protested at the hall Saturday where the auctioning was to take place. The troop leaders, in response, changed the procedure to one in which people signed up to have chores done.

Under the adopted procedure, the troop members would still be paid varying amounts for the chores they performed, but there was no auctioning.

Reston, in northwestern Fairfax County, is a town of about 14,000 persons, roughly 3 per cent of them black. Since 1969, it sponsored annually a black arts festival to promote better understanding of black culture.

Upset over possible misunderstandings the "slave sale" appeared to create, the 2-month-old Explorer Post No. 1970 posted an apology that said, in part, "the members, leaders and sponsors with all sincerity, wish to apologize to any and all persons whom we may have offended with the previous title of our fund-raising project, Slave Sale.

"We realize that slavery was a very real thing and not something to be taken lightly. We hope you realize we meant no harm and accept our apology."