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Information in this article, originally published May 30, was corrected June 3. The Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle is planning to convert the former Colman School into apartments. A previous version of this story said the league was planning condominiums.

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Younger Garrett: Urban League head flashed gun

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By [Keith Ervin](#)

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Seattle Times staff reporter

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A bitter feud among African-American activists flared up in a lobby at Rainier Beach High **School** last night, when the son of Omari Tahir-Garrett accused the president of the Urban League of brandishing a handgun.

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Police were summoned to a hallway outside the school's performing-arts center after Kwame Garrett, 25, and two associates accused James Kelly, president of the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle, of briefly displaying a gun.

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Kelly, reached by phone late last night, declined to answer whether he had carried a gun into the **school** — which would be a violation of law — before he made a statement to police. He said he had consulted with a lawyer last night and plans to seek a no-contact order against political foes, including both Garretts.

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Kelly, 47, said he has faced threats over the past year and a half as the Urban League negotiated a deal with the Seattle **School** District to buy the former **Colman School** for \$1.2 million.

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"I was surrounded. This was real," he said of the encounter at Rainier Beach.

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"I won't allow anyone to intimidate me," he said. "I've lived in this city 26 years. I have a child. I'm concerned about children. That's why I came to the meeting tonight."

Kwame Garrett, who unsuccessfully ran for the Legislature two years ago, is the son of Omari Tahir-Garrett, who was recently tried for allegedly assaulting former Mayor Paul Schell with a megaphone last summer. A King County Superior Court jury was unable to reach a verdict May 9, and prosecutors have announced their intention to retry him.

The Urban League proposes to convert the former **Colman School** into a \$24 million "village" that would include an African-American Heritage **Museum**, apartments and Urban League headquarters.

Omari Tahir-Garrett and others began an eight-year occupation of the building in 1985 to gain support for creation of a black-history **museum**. He and Earl Debnam object to commercializing the property and claim they are its rightful buyers under an agreement brokered by former Mayor Norm Rice.

Kwame Garrett said he asked Kelly if he knew him and then asked challenging questions about the Urban League's plan to "steal" the **Colman** property from the museum's original proponents. Garrett, who participated in the **Colman** occupation when he was 8, called himself "the **museum** baby."

Garrett, Debnam and Alleyeseeing Allah, a friend of Garrett's, said Kelly pulled open his coat, drew out a handgun and quickly put the weapon back. "I don't have to be afraid of you," Debnam quoted Kelly saying as he displayed the gun.

Debnam and Allah said they believed the gun was a semiautomatic.

Gila Curl, co-president of the Renton Black Parents Association, said she saw a man she did not recognize pull his coat open but did not see a gun. She said she then heard a second man ask the first man, "Why are you showing me a gun? Are you going to shoot me?"

There was some confusion as people stepped forward, Curl said. Witnesses said Kelly left the **school** immediately after the incident, without attending the community meeting.

No one said Kelly pointed the gun at anyone.

Police Department spokeswoman Deanna Nollette said police were called to Rainier Beach High at 6:15 p.m. She said a complaint was filed and police are investigating. A report on the incident was not available last night. She would not identify the individuals involved.

Kelly said he had asked for extra police patrols to protect his family in the face of repeated threats over the **museum**.

"I've had threats from, 'Watch your back,' 'We're going to pay a visit to you at your home,' 'The word on the street is,' 'The boys is going to do something,' 'If we've got to blow up the building along with the Urban League and everybody else' — it's all those."



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