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City will wage war on crime label - In anticipation it will remain ranked "most dangerous," it plans a rally Monday and is countering crime statistics. Camden wages a campaign against 'most dangerous' label

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Expecting to be named the "most dangerous city in America" for a second year in a row, Camden is mounting a campaign to head off the bad publicity.

CamConnect, a nonprofit group that analyzes and disseminates information about the city, said yesterday that it had examined statistics from other cities and determined that Camden would remain No. 1 based on the methodology used by Morgan Quitno Press.

A rally already is planned for Monday, the day the rankings will be released, and Rutgers University-Camden is offering experts and students who can counter the perception that Camden is a dangerous city.

Scott Morgan, publisher of Morgan Quitno's City Crime Rankings, said yesterday that he would not confirm Camden's position until Monday.

"It's clear that Camden did not have a good year in 2004," he said, "and the city retains its place with the usual cast of characters: Baltimore, Richmond, Flint, St. Louis and Detroit."

At the center of Camden's counteroffensive is the fact that the new rankings are based on 2004 statistics.

They do not take into account an 18 percent decrease in crime through the first eight months of 2005, Camden County Prosecutor Vincent P. Sarubbi wrote in a letter to community leaders yesterday, urging them to attend Monday's "Rally for Camden" at Antioch Baptist Church at Seventh Street and Ferry Avenue.

He also cited a Police Department reorganization, an "unprecedented period of revitalization," and a growing number of tourists on the waterfront as evidence that public safety in Camden was improving.

Last year's ranking by the Kansas publisher cast a pall over development in the city and caused a dip in enrollment at Rutgers-Camden.

Among the deals scuttled: the construction of a major hotel near the campus, Sarubbi said.

"Through its flawed analysis of outdated data, Morgan Quitno has done considerable financial and psychological harm to a city working hard to address challenges created over decades," Sarubbi said.

The FBI and several mathematicians and criminologists have taken issue with Morgan

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Quitno's methodology, which weighs six types of crime equally and provides little, if any, context.

"Every year, Morgan Quitno asks for the data, and we send a letter saying that 'we remind you that the FBI does not rank or suggest that you use the data to rank,' " said Maryvictoria Pyne, chief of the FBI's Communications Unit. "They do it anyway."

Ranking Camden as "America's most dangerous city" does not account for its status as one of America's poorest cities.

"They're acting as though these numbers have meaning. They don't," said Jon'a Meyer, professor of criminal justice at Rutgers. "In a sense, they're saying if you go to a concert at the Tweeter Center, you're going to get killed. That's just not true.

"What these numbers are is an index of crime that can only be used for comparison to other cities with the same demographics."

Joel Best, author of *More Damned Lies and Statistics: How Numbers Confuse Public Issues*, said cities could be ranked according to crime data, but added, "Do these rankings mean anything?"

"Not really."

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