

Gun buyback program aims to curb violence on city streets

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Rochester Police Chief James Sheppard Friday morning announced an inmate-led initiative to try to curb violence in the city.

Inmates at the Orleans Correctional Facility in Albion raised about \$1,050 to fund a gun buyback program in an effort to curtail violent crime in Rochester, said Orleans facility superintendent Sandra Dolce.

“They wanted to reach out, into our community,” Sheppard said. “It’s so powerful, so moving.”

Sheppard, who admitted he is not typically a proponent of gun buyback programs, called the program “monumental” because the idea started with a group of inmates. The men, he said, came together to tell Rochesterians that “violence is not the answer,” he said. “It is truly remarkable that the violence and deaths of so many of our young people in our city has motivated (inmates) to initiate such a proactive effort.”

Both the Rochester Police Foundation and Full Gospel Tabernacle Church in Rochester matched the funds. Overall, more than \$3,100 is available to be distributed through the gun buyback program.

Dolce said the Orleans inmates, about 100 men who have been dubbed the Civic Duty Initiative Team, hope to continue the effort. Orleans Correctional Facility houses up to 1,100 medium-security inmates, she said.

“This sends a powerful message from the inmates,” said the Rev. Ira White of Full Gospel Tabernacle Church. “Their purpose is to save lives. They’re saying that you can change your life, you can do different than you have done.”

Full Gospel Tabernacle Church, 614 Clifford Ave., will hold a gun buyback event from 1 to 5 p.m. Sept. 22. Anyone who turns in a handgun will receive a \$100 Wegmans gift card and anyone who hands over a long gun will get a \$50 Wegmans gift card.

The last gun buyback drive was held by RPD about four years ago and brought in around 40 guns, Sheppard said.

The program, while not department-led, is one of several initiatives in place to try to curb violent crime in Rochester.

In July, Rochester police started patrolling the city's most crime-ridden areas in greater numbers and with renewed intensity, in a program dubbed “Cool Down.”

A key part of that effort, Sheppard said, was for officers to focus on city residents “engaging in violent behavior” and to get illegal weapons off the street.

“Let’s make it safer,” White said. “I think we can do it together ... one gun at a time.”