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IS DEATH PENALTY PUNISHMENT FOR WOULD-BE MARTYR?

NOT ENOUGH BUCKS FOR THE BANGS

\$4,000 HELPS COLLECT 23 RIFLES/SHOTGUNS, 44 HANDGUNS



Cpl. Ray Metcalf with the Wilmington Police Department (from left) works with Cpl. Lacey Locklear, Officer Scott Bramley and police property technician Casey Ludlum to organize firearms that were collected during the Demetrius Greene-Josh Proutey Gun Buyback in Wilmington on Saturday. See more photos at StarNewsOnline.com. Photos by Matt Born

Buyback gets 67 guns, runs out of money

BY ADAM WAGNER
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El Gutierrez went to the Grace Methodist Church on Saturday morning with the intention of turning a .38-caliber pistol a neighbor gave him over to police to be destroyed as part of the Demetrius Greene-Josh Proutey Gun Buyback.

"I have kids in the house and I have another gun for protection," Gutierrez said, adding that he didn't know the background of the pistol.

What he found was Pastor Scott Dodson telling him the buyback had been so successful that it had run through its \$4,000 reserve by 9:30 a.m., a half hour after the event started.

Dodson told Gutierrez he could hang onto the gun until there was, hopefully, another buyback event, or sell it to a group of private vendors who could offer him slightly more money.

After a police officer checked the gun to make sure it wasn't stolen, Gutierrez chose to wait for another buyback event.

"Basically, I want to get it destroyed," he said.

Gutierrez's pistol is still in his hands, but



Saturday's buyback was named for Demetrius Greene, an 8-year-old who was killed by a stray bullet in Wilmington in 1997, and Josh Proutey, who was shot and killed during a downtown robbery last December. *StarNews file photos*

67 other guns are off Wilmington's streets as a result of the buyback program at three sites, including 23 rifles or shotguns and 44 handguns. Some of those weapons were donated for free after the buyback program ran out of money.

"We could have these at crime scenes or we could have them on this table," said Ben David, New Hanover County's district attorney. "This is a whole lot less expensive than a murder trial."

In addition to the District Attorney's Of-

fice, Leading Into New Communities (LINC), the Wilmington Police Department and the New Hanover County Sheriff's Office helped coordinate and operate the buyback, which also had sites at Warner Temple AMEZ Church and St. Andrews AMEZ Church.

Buybacks have taken heavy criticism in recent years, as academics say the guns that show up at them aren't the ones being used to perpetuate crime and, therefore, have mainly a symbolic benefit.

"Sometimes (buybacks) are just triggered by a sense within a community that gun violence is endemic," said Jon Vernick, co-director of the Center for Gun Policy and Research at Johns Hopkins University. "... I fully understand the sense of sometimes helplessness that communities sometimes have and the need to do something."

Saturday's buyback was named for Demetrius Greene, an 8-year-old who was killed by a stray bullet in Wilmington in 1997, and Josh Proutey, who was shot and killed during a downtown robbery last December.

"My motto on this is if I can take one or two guns off the street, then that's one or

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U.S. moves forces toward Syria; inquiry continuing

Associated Press

WASHINGTON | U.S. intelligence officials sought Saturday to determine whether Syria's government unleashed a deadly chemical weapons attack on its people. At the same time, the Obama administration prepared for a possible military response by moving naval forces closer to Syria.

Meeting on the issue Saturday with his national security team, President Barack Obama received a detailed review of the range of options he has requested for the U.S. and its international partners to respond if the fact-finding process concludes that Syrian President Bashar Assad engaged in deadly chemical warfare, the White House said.

At the same time, Obama has emphasized that quick intervention in the years-old Syrian civil war was problematic because of the

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City Church Tallahassee Pastor Dean Inerra: 'We have some gay couples that attend our church. What happens when they ask us to do their wedding? What happens when we say no? Is it going to be treated like a civil rights thing?' Photo by Associated Press

Churches changing bylaws after rulings on gay marriage

BY TRAVIS LOLLER
Associated Press

NASHVILLE, TENN. | Worried they could be sued by gay couples, some churches are changing their bylaws to reflect their view that the Bible allows only marriage between one man and one woman.

Although there have been lawsuits against wedding industry businesses that refuse to serve gay couples, attorneys promoting the bylaw changes say they don't know of any lawsuits against churches.

Critics say the changes are unnecessary, but some churches fear that it's only a matter of time before one of them is sued.

"I thought marriage was always between one man and one woman, but the Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision said no," said Gregory S. Erwin, an attorney for the Louisiana Baptist Convention. "I think it's better to be prepared because the law is changing. America is changing."

In a June decision, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a provision of the federal Defense of Marriage Act that defined marriage as between a man and a woman for purposes of federal law. A second decision was more technical but essentially ushered in legal gay marriage in California.

Kevin Snider is an attorney with the Pacific Justice Institute, a nonprofit legal de-

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At Saturday's buyback, \$100 was offered for handguns, shotguns and rifles and \$200 for assault weapons. Photo by Matt Born

GUNS

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two lives that those guns will never encounter," said Patrick Holmes, the buyback's organizer.

'The evidence ... is not there'

A key criticism of gun buyback programs, though, is that they do not offer enough money to bring in the most dangerous firearms.

"When you think about people who'd be strongly motivated to retain their weapons — you have to ask why that might be and people who have wicked purposes in mind that they need to have a firearm to accomplish — the offer of low amounts of money isn't enough to get them to give that up," said Lance Stell, a professor of philosophy and director of the Medical Humanities Program at Davidson University.

At Saturday's buyback, \$100 was offered for handguns, shotguns and rifles and \$200 for assault weapons.

Another critique of buybacks involves the kinds of guns that are

being handed over to law enforcement.

"Disproportionately you tend to get older guns, lower-caliber guns, disproportionately you get guns that aren't even in working condition," Vernick said.

Nationally, older women tend to participate in buyback programs while young men are the highest-risk population for perpetuating gun violence.

Frankie Roberts, executive director of Leading Into New Communities, a nonprofit that was one of the gun buyback's lead organizations, agreed that one buyback wasn't likely to stem all violence, but also tried to take a more pragmatic approach to the buybacks.

"I look at it like a farmer," Roberts said.

"If I knew the seeds that were gonna grow, those would be the only seeds I'd plant."

David pointed to the ability of buyback programs to cut off cheap, secondary markets as one of their strengths.

"We want there to be a market for the sale and valid purchases of weapons," David said. "What we're trying to do is eliminate that black

market."

David pointed to the 2004 killing of Gail Tice as one that could have been prevented by a buyback program.

Robert Hewson, Tice's estranged husband, tried to buy a weapon at a gun store and was turned down because Tice had taken out a domestic violence protection order against him.

He later bought a .38-caliber handgun at a yard sale and used it to shoot and kill Tice through the windows of her Landfall home.

Experts were more optimistic that incidents such as Tice's killing could be prevented by buybacks, but it's very difficult to measure their effect on crimes that did not happen.

"Although the evidence for reducing street crime is not there," Vernick said, "these programs could reduce what you might think of as household-level risk factors for gun violence."

For example, Vernick added, removing a gun from the house of a depressed teen or where there is domestic violence or a curious young child could help prevent an incident.

Continuing the push

Vernick believes buybacks are only a force for change if they take place in conjunction with other efforts.

"I don't have an objection to communities doing buybacks as long as it's not the only thing you do, as long as a community doesn't think it's made a substantial contribution to solving the problem and then can go back to the status quo," Vernick said, adding that political pressure and organizations such as Chicago's CeaseFire initiative can enact more lasting change.

In other words, Holmes, LINC, the law enforcement agencies and the churches need to continue pushing to reduce gun violence.

Holmes and other organizers say they're already laying the groundwork for their next buyback program, which could take place in October or November.

Dodson, the pastor, said he would approach businesses in downtown Wilmington about providing the event with corporate sponsorship so it could rely on more than donations from private citizens to purchase weapons.

"Anytime you can get firearms out of the hands of people who are uneducated about using them safely, it's a good thing," Dodson said.

While Holmes is planning his next buyback program, he will also be working to bring a gun safety program to Wilmington.

"Our young people, they need to be informed, they need to be educated," he said. "And not only young people. We had a woman today probably 60 years old say, 'I had a gun in my house and I don't know anything about gun safety.'"

Another way Holmes and other organizers plan to cut down on gun violence is by reaching out to those who could perpetuate or be victimized by it. Holmes has acted as a mentor in 100 Black Men of Coastal North Carolina, while Roberts' LINC helps ex-prisoners get their lives on track so they don't turn back to crime.

"We have to continue a dialogue with these young men," Holmes said. "We have to find ways of bridging that gap between us and the young people."

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