



Report illegal gun use, sheriff urges

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EDWARDSVILLE — As a double murder trial began its second day in the nearby Madison County Courthouse, Sheriff Robert Hertz announced a new community campaign to crack down on gun violence.

“As we speak, there is a trial going on in the Criminal Courts Building,” Hertz said, referring to the April 2003 slayings of two men outside an Alton nightclub. “A man is charged with murder for killing two people with a gun. One guy he shot 13 times; the other guy he is alleged to have shot five times.”

Called “Operation Stop Gun Violence,” the initiative provides three free gunlocks to anyone in Madison County who wants them and the opportunity to surrender unwanted guns, which will be destroyed.

The initiative also reminds residents of the county’s 24-hour anonymous tip line, (618) 296-3000.

Hertz emphasized the tip line’s effectiveness over the past four years in helping to curb underage drinking parties and said he hopes residents will report names of people who are carrying guns illegally.

In Illinois, it is generally illegal to carry a concealed firearm.

Hertz reiterated that the Sheriff’s Department is not after legal gun owners but those with bad intentions.

“Those people out there carrying guns on their person or in their cars illegally, as far as I’m concerned, are people with marginal intelligence at best, that are flaunting the law and are cowards,” he said. “These people are out there trying to play big shot, carrying a gun, and they really had no good intention.”

Madison County sheriff’s deputies have seized “hundreds” of handguns in the past year, Hertz said, noting that the new effort is a proactive approach to stopping gun-related violence instead of waiting until after a crime occurs.

Anyone, no matter their location, can call the anonymous tip line, Hertz said. If the department receives a tip, investigators always will check out the case and notify local authorities, he said.

In making his presentation, Hertz read excerpts from several reports on gun violence that have appeared in the press, including the killings in Alton. His backdrop was a glass display case filled 25 years ago with seized weapons. Beside him on a table were about 50 recently seized handguns.

He picked up a confiscated, palm-sized .22-caliber revolver off the table and slipped it into his suit pocket.

“You take this gun here. It is highly concealable, but very deadly,” he said.

He also said it was very likely that some of the recently seized guns were used in murders. They ranged in size from the miniature to some of the largest handguns available.

“It’s safe to say there are people out there, good law-abiding citizens, that know of someone who is carrying a gun illegally, either on their person or in the car,” Hertz said. “Strictly from the standpoint of saving lives, we want them to share that information with us.”

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