



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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Note: Audio comments from U.S. Attorney Todd Graves and a photo of area representatives who attended the event are available online at www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow

LOCAL CRIME FIGHTING ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVE NATIONAL RECOGNITION

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that a team of organizations received a national award for their fight against gun crime.

Members of the federal, state, and local Project Safe Neighborhoods team returned from a U.S. Department of Justice conference in Philadelphia this weekend. More than 1,300 prosecutors, law enforcement officials, and community leaders attended the national conference to coordinate local strategies to prevent gun violence and take criminals who use guns off our nation's streets.

The Western District of Missouri's Project Safe Neighborhoods/Project Ceasefire Team received the U.S. Department of Justice's Outstanding Partnership or Task Force Award. The combined efforts of several local organizations helped in earning this national recognition.

"It is truly an honor for our Ceasefire partnership to be recognized in this way, with a national award that carries so much significance," Graves said. "We were cited above all other collaborations in the country."

The United States Attorney's Offices in the Western District of Missouri and District of Kansas, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Kansas City Crime Commission, the University of Missouri-Kansas City, the Project Safe Neighborhoods Task Force and Kansas City Missouri and Kansas City Kansas Police Departments pooled their resources to reduce gun crimes in the metropolitan area. Collectively, the organizations have achieved outstanding

success, with homicides at a 30-year low. The U.S. Department of Justice recognized that success at the awards ceremony last weekend.

“All of those people involved in the effort to reduce gun crime in Kansas City have been working tirelessly to keep this community safe and deserve to be applauded for their efforts,” Graves said.

At the conference, local team members were addressed by several senior federal government officials, including Attorney General John Ashcroft, Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson and the Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives Bradley Buckles.

“This conference was an important tool in bringing together all those who work to eliminate illegal gun use and make our streets more safe,” said Attorney General John Ashcroft, who spoke at the conference. “The team of community, state and federal leaders and law enforcement officials will ensure that offenders face hard time in prison.”

The Project Safe Neighborhoods conference provided training on topics from enforcement strategies to get gun violators off the streets, to school programs to prevent violence, to community partnership building initiatives. The conference continues Project Safe Neighborhoods’ unprecedented coordination between all levels of government to implement a national strategy to prevent gun violence on a local level, and pursue the strongest possible punishment for those who violate firearms laws.

The Western District of Missouri’s Project Safe Neighborhoods/Project Ceasefire Team received the U.S. Department of Justice’s Outstanding Partnership or Task Force Award. The combined efforts of several local organizations helped in earning this national recognition.

Since Project Ceasefire’s inception, the United States Attorney’s Office in the Western District of Missouri has aggressively convicted 321 gun criminals in Kansas City. Two hundred ninety-eight defendants entered guilty pleas and another 23 were convicted by trial.

“The United States Attorney’s Offices’ top priority as a partner in Project Ceasefire is to incarcerate prior felons caught with guns,” Graves said. “Both offices look forward to maintaining the program and increasing its effectiveness in years to come.”

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms’ contribution to the partnership also has been substantial, Graves said. The ATF Kansas City II Field Office’s investigative efforts have, in large part, made the prosecution and incarceration of gun criminals possible. The ATF’s staff consists of two full-time agents plus one detective from the KCPD and one detective from the KCKPD. The ATF’s involvement focuses on reducing the frequency of violent firearms crime in the Kansas City area.

“This prestigious award is a direct result of efforts of the police departments; Kansas City Metropolitan Crime Commission and United States Attorney’s Office support,” said Mark

James, ATF Kansas City Field Division Special Agent in Charge. “We will continue to target gun violence impacting our communities.”

The Kansas City Crime Commission is another partner in the district’s involvement in Project Safe Neighborhoods. The Crime Commission, which consists of almost 40 volunteer board members, is a non-profit citizen’s organization that puts private financial contributions to work fighting gun crimes. The Crime Commission has taken the lead in developing the community outreach and media campaign of Project Ceasefire. The Valentine/Radford Advertising Agency, whose president is on the Crime Commission board, developed and implemented a comprehensive media campaign on behalf of Project Ceasefire. In 2001-2002, the Crime Commission raised nearly \$1.4 million in private funds to add to its Project Safe Neighborhoods grant money.

“The Crime Commission’s media program sends the message that felons in possession of a firearm will face time,” Graves said.

The University of Missouri-Kansas City has been involved with the Kansas City Crime Commission’s efforts. The University has conducted extensive research charting the effectiveness of the media campaign. This was done by an innovative survey of felons at the offices of Missouri State Probation and Parole. The surveys measured the retention by the “target audience” of several television, radio and billboard advertisements.

Finally, the Western District’s Project Safe Neighborhoods Task Force has played an important role in this effort. The Task Force has actively been recruiting the community to help fight gun crimes in the Kansas City area.

“The Ceasefire partnership has drastically increased awareness and decreased gun crime in the community,” Graves said.

For instance, UMKC’s research shows that 78.9 percent of offenders have been exposed in some way to the Ceasefire campaign and 73 percent of offenders have seen the Project Ceasefire television advertisement featuring attorney Johnnie Cochran. In turn, 73.6 percent of offenders that took part in the University’s study said they believe it is “very likely” that a person with a prior felony would be charged with a crime if caught with a gun. More importantly, KCPD statistics also show the partnership in Project Safe Neighborhoods is effective. The department recently reported decreases in nearly every category of crime from 2001 to 2002. Examples include a 29 percent decrease in homicides, 15 percent decrease in robberies and 17 percent decrease of auto thefts. This is in contrast to recent rises in crime nationwide. Kansas City, Kan., Police Department figures show similar decreases in crime.

“The proof is in the numbers and these cooperating partnerships work,” Graves said. “The Ceasefire partnership’s hard work is deserving of the 2003 Project Safe Neighborhoods Outstanding Partnership/Task Force Award.”

The national PSN conference was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice in

partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police, National District Attorneys' Association and the National Crime Prevention Council.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow