

Police collect 98 firearms

**The anonymous Western
Massachusetts program
helps prevent household
accidents and decreases**

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WEST SPRINGFIELD — The “gifts for guns” exchange conducted on Saturday at six area drop-off locations netted 98 firearms, including a German World War I pistol and a Japanese World War II rifle.

“You could clearly see the relief on those people’s faces” when they turned in the guns, said Baystate Health spokesman Benjamin C. Craft.

The buyback program is sponsored by area law enforcement, Baystate, and **F.L. Roberts & Co.**, he said. It was conducted in Springfield, East Longmeadow, Longmeadow, Westfield, West Springfield, and Wilbraham.

The program gives people an opportunity to turn in unwanted firearms with “no

questions asked” in return for gift cards for local stores, said Craft.

Someone also took a whip to the Wilbraham Police Department and a black 20-inch military projectile to the West Springfield police.

“We didn’t give anything for the whip,” Craft said.

In three years, 385 firearms have been turned in, he said.

The anonymous program helps prevent household accidents and decreases community violence, said Springfield Police Lt. Trent J. Hufnagel.

“That’s our main goal today: to get guns out of homes, particularly where they might have children,” he said.

An Agawam man who surrendered a Grendel P-30 .22 Magnum pistol and a Soviet-made SKS rifle said he wanted to get rid of them because of

his two children.

“I was in the military for six years, and I picked up (the weapons) because I had friends in a gun club,” he said. “Now, with the kids, I don’t want the weapons around. I don’t think they’re necessary.”

West Springfield Police Capt. Anthony J. Viecelli said that keeping the program anonymous is an important part of making it work.

“We don’t ask for the donors’ names,” he said. “As far as we’re concerned, any gun taken off the streets is well worth our time.”

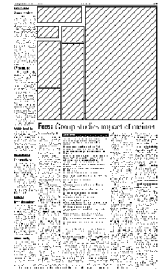
The turnout on Saturday was good, he said.

Besides the projectile, 27 firearms were taken to the West Side station, including a pistol from World War I.

“Some lady had it,” said Viecelli. “It’s a German pistol, probably used by one of their officers.”

All collected firearms will be destroyed, he said. They include three small-caliber semi-automatic pistols also surrendered to the department on Saturday.

“These are the most dangerous in this collection,” Viecelli said. “This is what we are finding in the streets being used in robberies. They are very popular with criminals.”





Staff photo by CHRISTOPHER EVANS

West Springfield Police Capt. Anthony J. Vicelli, left, and Officer Daniel J. Znoj look on firearms and ammunition turned in during Saturday's Gifts for Guns exchange.

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