

Keeping kids safe from gun dangers at home

Coalition of Community Partners announces third annual Firearms Buyback Program

SPRINGFIELD — Making home a safer place has never been so rewarding.

Medical staff from Baystate Children's Hospital, area law-enforcement leaders and juvenile-court officials gathered Wednesday at Baystate Medical Center to announce the third annual Gifts for Guns firearms buyback, in which citizens may trade working guns for gift cards. This year, F.L. Roberts & Co. is donating gift cards and coupon books of up to \$50 for each gun. The Gifts for Guns program is set for Saturday, May 9, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., with gun drop-off locations in Springfield, East Longmeadow, Longmeadow, Westfield, West Springfield and Wilbraham.

Dr. Kevin P. Moriarty, a pediatric surgeon at Baystate Children's Hospital, sees firsthand the traumatic effects of firearms discharge in the home. "The real tragedy of so many of these terrible gun injuries to kids is that they are entirely preventable," said Dr. Moriarty. "Always keeping guns locked, unloaded and off-limits to kids — or, better yet, not having guns in your home at all — would effectively end the danger to children. We would stop seeing young people's lives shattered by guns."

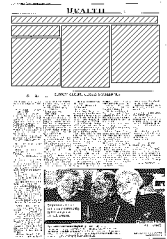
A gun in the home is 22 times more likely to kill a family member or friend than kill an intruder. Suicide is the leading cause of death associated with the use of a gun in the home. And 40% of homes with children in the U.S. have guns, many unlocked or loaded. In 2002, 13,053 children were injured by a firearm, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"In my years on the bench, I've never seen kids and guns combining for a good result," said Judge Daniel Swords of Hampden County Juvenile Court. "We hope that people will take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to keep their homes and families safe from the terrible physical and psychological wounds that guns can inflict."

People wishing to dispose of operable guns may bring them to the Joseph A. Budd Youth Assessment Center at 417 Liberty St. in Springfield or police departments in any of the participating towns, where officers will collect the weapons and issue gift cards. (The Westfield Police will accept guns at the Community Policing Office at Westfield City Hall.) The exchange is completely anonymous: No gun registrations are required and no names or other identification are requested. Gift cards and coupons valued at up to \$50 will be offered for handguns, and up to \$35 for long guns. Free gun locks and injury-prevention material will be available, too.

Springfield-based F.L. Roberts & Co. is generously contributing F.L. Roberts gift cards and other incentives for Gifts for Guns. The gift cards may be used for fuel or in-store purchases at nearly 30 F.L. Roberts convenience stores, Jiffy Lube service centers and Golden Nozzle Car Wash locations.

Lt. Trent Hufnagel of the Springfield Police Department and the Youth Assessment Center spoke about the importance of responsibility when it comes to firearms. "Gun ownership requires acting responsibly. If you can't keep your guns safe in your home, by locking them and keeping them unloaded and



inaccessible, you should get rid of them. Saturday we're going to make it easy for you to do that," said Lt. Hufnagel.

Weapons brought in for Saturday's exchange must be unloaded and placed in a clear plastic bag inside another container such as a gym bag or backpack. Any ammunition must be delivered in a separate bag, and if the guns are delivered by car, they must be transported in the trunk. Only working guns will be exchanged for gift cards.

"We are delighted that last year, we collected and disposed of 151 firearms as a result of this program," said Molly Gray, RN, Director of Baystate Children's Hospital. "Working in collaboration with area police departments, physicians, nurses, and others and with the commitment of F.L. Roberts, we can provide area citizens with an easy way to remove guns from their homes and enjoy a financial reward," she added. Gifts for Guns has taken nearly 300 firearms out of the reach of kids in western Massachusetts since its inception in 2007.

In addition to the Youth Assessment Center in Springfield, guns may be dropped off at these locations:

- East Longmeadow Police Department, 160 Somers Road, Tel: 525-5440
- Longmeadow Police Department, 34 Williams Street, Tel: 567-3311
- Westfield Police Department, Community Policing Office, City Hall, Tel: 562-5411
- West Springfield Police Department, 26 Central Street, Tel: 263-3210
- Wilbraham Police Department, 16 Main Street, Tel: 596-3837