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209 fugitives attempt to clear records

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Life got less stressful this week for many of the 209 area residents who turned themselves in to the Fugitive Safe Surrender program, which wrapped up Saturday at the Bethel Christian Fellowship Church on East Avenue.

The four-day program, a U.S. Marshals Service initiative, allowed people with outstanding arrest warrants to clear their records. Some saw a judge and had the whole case wrapped up in one day. Others got a court date for next week. Only four people were taken into custody, said Peter Lawrence, U. S. marshal for the Western district of New York.

Officials processed more than 300 separate charges, since some people's warrants contained multiple charges, Lawrence said. Ten of these were felonies, and the rest were misdemeanors or lower.

The Rev. Deloris Simpson of First Genesis Baptist Church, one of about 100 volunteers, said the people who participated underwent a noticeable change in attitude. "They come in very tense — we've had some crying," she said. "But when they leave, they're smiling."

The turnout, however, was somewhat disappointing, Lawrence said. Program coordinators had hoped to have a couple hundred more people show up. "I suppose the way I have to look at it is, there are 209 people out there who have taken the first step toward getting back into society and putting their lives back on track," Lawrence said.

Rochester is the eighth city to host this program. It costs about $50,000, not including salaries for judges, police officers and other workers, Lawrence said.

Those who took advantage of Fugitive Safe Surrender gained peace of mind, and most received more favorable treatment than they would have otherwise, Lawrence said.

Simpson, who's part of the Rochester Police Department's Clergy Response Team, praised the program for taking good care of each person who walked through the door.

"There's people in this city now who can stand upright," she said.

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