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## "(AP) U.S. marshal pleased with fugitive surrender program"

AKRON, Ohio

A program that allows fugitives to surrender without fear or intimidation reached its fourth city this week and thousands have turned themselves in since its inception in 2005. A similar program in Tennessee is being planned for Memphis and Nashville.

In the latest stop for U.S. Marshals Service's Fugitive Safe Surrender Program, hundreds of people wanted on various charges have come to The House of the Lord church since Wednesday.

The federal program, piloted in Cleveland, encourages nonviolent felony offenders to turn themselves in at a church. It's designed to avoid potentially dangerous confrontations.

Volunteers, wearing blue Fugitive Safe Surrender T-shirts, directed fugitives to the entrance. Participants placed belongings in a plastic bag and passed through a metal detector. Then came the legal forms — a warrant information sheet, an intake interview sheet and an intake survey consent form.

Law enforcement officers took fingerprints.

An Akron Municipal Court judge waited in the church nursery. Court appointed attorneys were available on site.

A similar program is being planned for Tennessee — Nashville in August and Memphis in September, Elliott said.

Denny King, the U.S. Marshal in Nashville, was in Akron on Thursday to observe the process.

"It's just phenomenal," he said. "The people you see here are making important changes in their lives."

He explained that running from the law means a person can't honestly get a job or a driver's license.

"The main thing about this program is it gives them an avenue to change their lives, which then lets them change their behavior," King said.

LaTasha Rouser, 26, of Akron, said Thursday that she decided to turn herself in after three years on the run. She had fled from a halfway house and was wanted for forgery and escape.

"A friend told me I should try to turn myself in and get myself together," she said. "I was scared about coming in, because I was thinking I was going to go to jail. But they were very nice. I'm very glad that I came. I met positive people."

She went before a judge and was ordered to serve 90 days at Oriana House, the same place she fled from.

"I'm not running from anybody and I feel great. I can start over," she said.

Most defendants were able to go home the same day.

"This is going to make the streets safer by having less people out there with warrants," said U.S. Marshal Peter J. Elliott of the Northern District of Ohio.

Akron's program runs through Saturday.

Elliott said 141 fugitives came in Wednesday and about the same number came through Thursday. He said he was impressed, because Akron is the smallest city yet to try the program.

Cleveland had 859 people turn themselves in over four days in 2005. Since then, Phoenix had a four-day total of about 1,300 and Indianapolis had a total of 531.

Elliott, who conceived the idea for the community re-entry initiative, attributes the success of the program to the people's trust in clergy and faith-based institutions.

"The church is here to help people and these are people who want help and need help," said Bishop F. Josephus Johnson, pastor and founder of The House of the Lord. "We just opened our doors. This is a community effort."

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On the Net:

Fugitive Safe Surrender: <http://www.safesurrender.us/>

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Information from: Akron Beacon Journal, <http://www.ohio.com>

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