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Posted on Sat, Jul. 14, 2007

## Fugitives release burden

Tired of hiding, 1,125 turn selves in at church

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One man, facing forgery and theft warrants, both felonies, drove all the way from Florida.

A woman, who had been avoiding several misdemeanors, drove in from Michigan.

Another woman drove 10 hours to Georgia, picked up her fiance, who had been skirting a misdemeanor drug-possession warrant for seven years, and drove all night to reach Akron by Saturday morning.

They were just a few of the 1,125 fugitives who turned themselves in to Summit County law enforcement authorities starting Wednesday. Saturday, the last day in Akron for the U.S. Marshals Service Fugitive Safe Surrender Program, was the busiest day of all, with 604 fugitives showing up at the House of the Lord on Diagonal Road.

Akron was the fourth city to host the Safe Surrender program, beating turnout in both Cleveland (850) and Indianapolis (530). Only Phoenix saw more fugitives, with 1,320 surrendering last November.

"We'll never know what we'll have until we get here," said U.S. Marshal Peter J. Elliott, who conceived the idea several years ago. "I never knew what it would do, but now I know it works. Akron will be the model for the rest of the country."

Most of those turning themselves in were wanted on nonviolent charges, though two escapees showed up, both of whom were taken back to jail. In all, five fugitives faced serious enough charges that they were arrested and taken to jail.

Most, though, were people looking to clear their names so they could stop worrying whenever they saw a police car.

Roy Taylor, a 50-year-old truck driver from Akron, had several charges related to his pit bull killing other dogs, each with a \$500 fine. He feared being pulled over in his tractor-trailer, having his record reviewed, then being hauled off to jail and having his truck towed.

"I'm here to clear this up, simple as that," he said.

Terry Amos, 42, of Akron, had been serving a 60-day sentence at Oriana House for driving with a suspended license and fleeing police. But 40 days into his stay, he gained a work release and walked away.

"I just got fed up with it," he said. "When I got the opportunity to get out, I didn't go back."

Now, he said, he wants to live his life without worrying about the repercussions of that decision.

"They're offering me a second chance," he said, "and I want to believe in that."

Both Amos and Taylor said that holding the program in a church made all the difference, because it seemed less threatening -- even though the church was teeming with deputies, marshals, judges and prosecutors.

And that's exactly why Safe Surrender decided to involve churches, Elliott said. If fugitives feel comfortable turning themselves in, he said, it will lessen the risk of violent confrontations between police and fugitives.

"They surrendered because it was in a church. They trust the church; it's part of their community," he said. "They don't trust me. They'll never trust somebody like me."