

Local social justice forum to tackle murder, weapons, violence Panelists: Rash of violent crime spurs need for dialogue

Wednesday, October 17, 2007

by Tara Roberts

Moscow-Pullman Daily News

Staff writer

Multiple shooting deaths in Moscow and Latah County this spring and summer left many people shaken and concerned about violence in their community.

“We’re still suffering from the aftermath of a lot of unnecessary deaths,” local criminal defense attorney Tim Gresback said. “For the first time, Moscow citizens feel their safety is in jeopardy.”

The Moscow Human Rights Commission is sponsoring a social justice forum to address the concerns that have arisen over the past few months.

“Murder, Weapons and Violence on the Palouse: What Should We Do?” is scheduled for 4:30-6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Hamilton Indoor Recreation Center in Moscow. The forum will feature a panel that includes lawyers, law enforcement officials and social service providers.

The first in a series of killings in the area occurred March 31, when University of Idaho student David Boss was found dead in his Moscow apartment from a gunshot wound. John Delling has been charged with Boss’ murder and with the killing of Boise State University student Bradley Morse. He also is suspected in a third shooting in Tucson, Ariz.

In May, rural Moscow resident Jason Hamilton killed three others before shooting himself. James Curtis Leonard of Genesee has been charged with the mid-June shooting death of Tyler Pace Lee of Moscow, and Zachary A. Fredrickson of Troy has been charged with the June 30 shooting death of another Troy man, Jeremiah Johnson.

Gresback said the commission decided to wait a few months after the crimes to host the forum to give people time to grieve.

“Sometimes we don’t do our best public policy work in the immediate aftermath of a tragedy,” he said.

Gresback said the forum’s panelists will address issues such as how the criminal justice system should work with people who have mental health problems, what additional tools probation officers need to rehabilitate offenders, and what officials already are doing well to “decrease the likelihood of deadly violence.”

The forum also will feature a public question period.

“The Human Rights Commission wants to provide all citizens a voice in shaping our policies ... to reduce violence,” Gresback said.

Panelist Joan Fisher, who represents death row inmates in federal court, said she hopes to hear a wide variety of community input.

“Hopefully it will be more than just the panel speaking out; it should be the public saying here’s our questions, here’s our concerns, and we can have an exchange of ideas,” she said.

Panelist Jamie Shropshire, Lewiston’s assistant city attorney and an instructor at the UI College of Law’s Victim’s Rights Clinic, said she hopes people leave the forum understanding the rights they have as victims.

“I think when something like (the Hamilton shooting) happens, a lot of people feel victimized, not just the people who had loved ones who were killed or injured,” she said.

Moscow Assistant Police Chief David Duke, another panelist, said the forum will discuss future ways to resolve conflict in the community.

“We’re not going to focus on blame, but we’re there to state concerns and at the same time try to answer any questions that come up,” he said.

Duke said he plans to talk about violence towards the police and “what remedies might be out there ... to see if we can try to change the trends that are occurring not just here in Moscow but nationwide.”

Duke said he also will emphasize that this summer’s violent crimes are an anomaly, not a trend.

Fisher said bringing together officials from the criminal justice, social services and mental health systems beings a needed dialogue. By discussing issues of violence from various perspectives, organizations may be able to find out how to better work together and generate new ideas.