

Group Against Sex Predators to Add Numbers in Alabama.

Members of law enforcement visit Akron to study structure of Summit GASP

By Bill Lilley

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Fran Doll was certain she had something positive to share shortly after she founded Grandparents Against Sex Predators nearly three years ago.

But Doll's concept of expanding her group's horizons wasn't exactly of the Lewis and Clark nature.

"I had envisioned that we'd get into Medina and Stark counties once we got ourselves established in Summit County," Doll said. "I thought we could grow slowly, very slowly."

The GASP concept and its advantages in helping local law enforcement, however, are so dynamic that it's going national even before it has a chance to go county to county.

Sheriff's Capt. Cleveland Moore and Wanda Jones, the victims' assistance unit leader of the Jefferson County (Ala.) Sheriff's Department, were in Akron on Monday to meet Doll and other representatives of GASP. Leaders of the Summit County Sheriff's Office also attended.

Their goal through the all-day seminar at the Superior Staffing conference room in Quaker Square was to study the organizational structure and learn from the positive experiences, as well as mistakes made by GASP, so they can return to Birmingham, Ala., and create their own GASP organization.



Fran Doll (left), president of Grandparents Against Sexual Predators, listens as Summit County Sheriff Chief Garry Moneypenny (center) talks about the group with Wanda Jones (right) and Capt. Cleveland Moore (far right) of the Jefferson County, Ala. Sheriff's Dept on Monday in Akron, Ohio. The two will lead the Birmingham, Ala. area GASP program. (Mike Cardew/Akron Beacon Journal)

"It totally threw me off guard when I got the call from a group in Birmingham that wanted to use us as the model," Doll said. "After I got over the initial shock and realized what this meant, I was extremely excited.

"I'm really glad GASP has gone to a national level because it gives us a chance to really spread our wings and just go to the places where we're directed to and need to be. This is fantastic for us and we're thrilled."

Local GASP members are involved with fingerprinting children, observing sex offenders in court, working with the sheriff to scan files of nearly 1,000 sexual predators, and training with the department in mock abductions, psychological profiling of predators and abduction techniques.

Moore, who grew up in Akron and graduated from East High School in 1970, said Jefferson County Sheriff Mike Hale heard about GASP through a short presentation by Summit Sheriff Drew Alexander at the national sheriffs conference in New Orleans a year ago.

"Our sex offenders unit at one time was made up of one person: me," Moore said. "We already involve the whole community, but I think it's even better to target one specific group: grandparents.

"We have grandparents who have been victims of sex predators. And this program would be a great tool to teach them and the rest of the public about sex offenders. It could spread throughout Alabama.

"But what I love most about grandparents is that they are about as nosy as anyone I know. And I mean that in a positive way. They will tell you the make of a car, what its license number is and if there is a spot on the rear of

the car.

“They aren’t as rushed in life and they pay attention. They notice more things.”

Moore said grandparents also have the benefit of great wisdom.

“They have lived, they have seen and they have done,” he said. “There isn’t anything under the sun that is new to them. They have a great base of information and they will collect things with a suspicious eye.

“I couldn’t think of a better group to be involved with.”

Neither could Bill Holland, inspector in the sex offenders unit of the Summit County Sheriff’s Office.

“Having GASP and its volunteers married to us has definitely benefited the sheriff’s department,” Holland said.

He said the grandparents expand the law-enforcement work force “and they are vigilant, to say the least. And the price is right.”

Moore said his department, like any police agency in the country, will welcome the additional help.

“The grandparents will give us a lot of extra eyes,” Moore said. “And they also do a great job talking to each other. Grandparents do a great job networking with each other.

“The whole thing is just a wonderful concept and they have done a great job with GASP here in Akron. We are excited to bring GASP to Birmingham and get the senior citizens in our area just as involved as they are here in Akron.”

Monday’s session doesn’t mean Doll and what’s affectionately known as Fran’s Army—the 150 trained volunteers—are turning their back on Ohio.

GASP will hold a presentation at the Summit County Sheriff’s Training Center in Green on Feb. 10. Every police agency in Ohio has been invited.