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Kids
+
Guns*

GUNS FOR TOYS: THE NEW ANTI-CRIME CRUSADE

Newsweek®

GROWING UP SCARED

How Our Kids Are Robbed
of Their Childhood



Farewell to ARMS

Gun Swaps: Amnesty programs—and outright bribery—are gaining popularity and pulling some of America's 211 million firearms off the street

THE 34TH PRECINCT IS OUTTA f—ing control!" exclaimed Fernando Mateo. He wasn't talking police brutality. He meant the crowd queuing up for the guns-for-toys swap last week at the Washington Heights police station in northern Manhattan. Mateo, 35, a carpet entrepreneur who put together the program, turned on the squawk box in his midtown office for an update. "I've got 30 people waiting in our back room," said Captain Monahan of the 34th. "This is the busiest we've been yet. Fernando, man. I'm running out of coupons."

The idea is just catching fire. It originated Christmas week, while Mateo and his 14-year-old son, Freddy, were watching "Monday Night Football." During a commercial break, they flipped to a local news report of a shooting in the heavily Dominican Washington Heights. When the smoke cleared, two people lay dead and two seriously wounded. Mateo, himself an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, turned to his son and asked, "Freddy, what do I have to do to stop the killing?" His son replied, "If it means giving up my Christmas presents to get one gun off the street, I say go for it." The next day Mateo approached New York City Councilman Guillermo Linares, who worked out the details with Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly: turn in a firearm, no questions asked, and claim a \$100 gift certificate to Toys "R" Us, plus \$25 to \$75 in cash from the police. The four-day program proved so successful—317 guns collected in 60 hours—that it was extended through Jan. 6, if not beyond. Mateo, who contributed \$5,000 of his own,

raised nearly \$100,000 and persuaded the NAACP to spearhead a national organization. Corporate sponsors from Foot Locker to Dial-A-Mattress offered gift certificates for their own stores. Vows Mateo: "Once we've established this in New York, we will expand into the rest of the country."

Big Apple braggadocio, to be sure. After all, cities across America have sponsored similar buyback programs at least since 1988. A bit of self-promotion, too: no stranger to free publicity, Mateo has already appeared on "Oprah" twice and in the pages of *People* magazine for his role in training convicts for jobs in the construction trades. But he's definitely onto some-



JOHN MANTEL—NYC



FRANCIS ROBERTS

The stash for cash: Kelly and Mateo (left), weapons turned in to the 34th Precinct

thing big that's sweeping the country. People are fed up with violent crime—and the inability of police and politicians to protect them. They don't need to watch the evening news or the "death clock" in Times Square, which began ticking off nationwide gun fatalities on Jan. 1, to feel the horror of victimization. In 1993, 22 major cities racked up a record number of homicides. One in three Americans has a friend or relative who's been shot. People are worried that their children are growing up in a culture of fear (cover story, page 42). A steady toll of gun-related murders has finally forced civil rights leaders to focus on black-on-black crimes (page 22). Unwilling to lead lives of quiet timidity, ordinary civilians and ambi-

tious hucksters are teaming up with local police, using amnesty programs and outright bribery to pull guns off the streets. But with 211 million firearms—nearly one for every man, woman and child in America—it's a Sisyphean problem.

The gun-buyback effort seems to have originated five years ago in Denver. The Rev. Marshall Gourley, a Roman Catholic priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe, grew weary of burying so many slain parishioners. In April 1988 he exhorted his flock to "make a juramento [pledge] not to use guns" and lay them down on the altar. He won national media attention but only a handful of weapons. The next year, "led by the Holy Spirit" to offer \$100 per piece, with money donated

Bittersweet Surrender

Swap programs are spreading across U.S. cities, trading everything from food coupons to tickets to musical events for guns. Some campaigns are actually working.



St. Louis

Cash bounties brought in almost 8,500 guns in 1991—most were melted down to make a sculpture of a shooting victim (above). Still, St. Louis hit a new high in gun-related homicides in 1993.

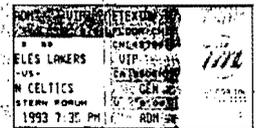
Atlanta

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference has sponsored four buybacks since April, netting 1,700 weapons. (A similar SCLC deal in Dayton, Ohio, yielded 1,000 arms in one day.) Given a choice of \$35

cash or a \$50 food coupon from local stores, most people took the money.

Dallas

Boasting "Real Cowboys Don't Carry Guns," the Dallas Cowboys are offering preseason game tickets. Apparently there aren't many real cowboys: only 30 guns have come in.



Los Angeles

A guns-for-seats swap by Ticketmaster and Bass Tickets pulled in 1,000 arms in L.A., San Francisco and Albuquerque. One big draw: Lakers games.

SCOTT DINE/TOP

anonymously, Father Gourley scored 60 guns. The program stumbled when an NRA member collected his \$100 and held a press conference to announce he was using the money to buy an assault weapon. But the idea took root—a "guns for goods" exchange soon emerged—and spread to other cities. In a monthlong buyback in 1991, St. Louis police nabbed nearly 8,500 firearms at a cost of \$341,000, using \$200,000 in assets seized from criminals and private donations. The city melted down the guns and used the metal to cast a statue of Christopher Harris, a 9-year-old shooting victim.