

July 29, 2009

## Nearly 100 take break on warrants

*By Lisa Roose-Church*  
*DAILY PRESS & ARGUS*

The 91 people who turned themselves in during Livingston County's recent initiative to clear outstanding warrants from the judicial docket was not quite as big of a turnout as officials hoped.

However, the initiative — dubbed SAFE, or Safe Apprehension of Fugitives Effort — was still a success, District Court Administrator Mary Ellen Nygren said Monday.

"It wasn't as good as I hoped, but I'm encouraged by the fact we had as many as we did," Prosecutor David Morse agreed. "Anytime you do something new, it seldom meets your expectations.

"The goal was to reduce the number of outstanding warrants and get some of these cases off the books, and we did that. It's a small number, but when you look at it, there's 91 people who came in who aren't looking over their shoulder at every traffic stop or cop behind them."

The 91 people who turned themselves in represents a total of 123 warrants from the District Court and Circuit Court dockets. That represents eight felony cases, 69 misdemeanors and 46 civil infractions or traffic offenses.

The misdemeanors included parking offenses, drug offenses, domestic violence and thefts. The felony warrants were for presenting forged checks and a possession of marijuana.

The SAFE initiative netted nearly \$15,000 in paid fines for District Court. Figures for Circuit Court were not available.

The fees being waived were the \$100 bench warrant fee, \$15 fingerprint fee and 20 percent late fees.

In addition, the county's judges gave defendants a break on their sentencings for turning themselves in.

"No one from District Court (warrants) went to jail that day," Nygren said.

That won't be true for the thousands who did not take advantage of the SAFE initiative.

Members of the Michigan State Police's fugitive team began going from door to door Monday to arrest those who did not turn themselves in on any outstanding warrants.

"They likely will get more jail time simply because they had the opportunity to turn themselves in and didn't," Morse said. "In speaking with the judges, there are going to be additional consequences for those who failed to turn themselves in when they had the opportunity."

Both Nygren and Morse attribute the low turnout to the lack of publicity prior to the event, which was

held July 16-17 at the Judicial Center on Highlander Way in Howell.

Nygren said her office mailed a flier to each of the people wanted on District Court warrants, but many were returned for bad addresses, which did not surprise her, considering some of the warrants were up to 10 years old. She said a larger media blitz — including billboards and advertising — could help increase the numbers if the event is held again.

County officials will meet in August to discuss what went right and what can be changed if they repeat the initiative.

Both Nygren and Morse agreed that they would be willing to repeat the effort.

"One of the things that was most rewarding was the number of people who said, 'You don't know how much better I feel not having the warrant over my head.' We had people thanking us," Nygren said.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Lisa Roose-Church at (517) 552-2846 or at [lrchurch@gannett.com](mailto:lrchurch@gannett.com).

---