

Law enforcement seminar focuses on juvenile murders

Teen killers don't 'snap' school, law officers told

By Michelle Mann

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Teen murder peaked in 1993 when 3,800 juveniles were arrested for homicide.

Today, some 1,800 teens kill every year. That equates to about five homicides per day.

Why do teens kill? And are there warning signs before they do?

Those questions were answered at the 7th Annual Law Enforcement Seminar held recently at the Civic Center in Ozark.

The annual law enforcement conferences were initiated as a way for area law enforcement to tackle regional issues during joint educational training, explained 33rd Judicial

Circuit District Attorney Kirke Adams.

This year the conference was opened to school administrators, guidance counselors and coaches because the keynote speaker, Phil Chalmers, is billed as America's leading authority on teen homicide.

An estimated 400 law enforcement officials and educators from several agencies and schools attended the event held at the Ozark Civic Center, double the amount of participants in previous years, Adams said.

Area district attorneys sponsoring the event were Adams, 12th Circuit District Attorney Tom Anderson, 22nd Circuit District

Attorney Walt Merrell, 3rd Circuit District Attorney Ben Reeves Jr., and 20th Circuit District Attorney Doug Valeska.

Coffee County Sheriff Dave Sutton, Dale County Sheriff Wally Olson, Geneva County Sheriff Tony Helms, Henry County Sheriff Will Maddox, Covington County Sheriff Dennis Meeks, Barbour County Sheriff LeRoy Upshaw, Pike County Sheriff Russell Thomas, Houston County Sheriff Donald Valenza and their respective departments were the law enforcement sponsors of the event.

Other co-hosts included the Ozark Police Department, the City of Ozark, and the Ozark City and Dale County Schools.

Chalmers told the group that he has personally interviewed 200 teen killers in his quest to find what makes them tick. "We want to bring this knowledge to Alabama," he said. "Today's mass murders look like pretty average kids."



Among the law enforcement officers and educators attending the seminar, from front, are Daleville Police Chief Harvey Mathis and Enterprise City Schools Coordinator of Student Services Zell Thomas.

Chalmers commended the law officers and educators present for

being the first responders in reducing killings in schools by about 300, though he said such shootings still occur at least once a week in the United States.

"Listen to what the kids say. Watch what they do," he advised. "We have a saying: You can't stop what you don't know so we want everybody to know.

"It's no longer the 'dangerous looking' kid; these killers are average kids," Chalmers cautioned. "You have to listen to what they are saying and watch what they are doing to see the signs. "There are five teen murders every single day. There are 12 young people who kill themselves every single day," Chalmers said. "I call this generation 'Generation Death,' one of the most violent generations our country has ever seen.

"They could look as gentle as a middle school ping pong player