

Cops, gangs to meet in 'call-in'

By [Luke Hegdal](#)

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WALLA WALLA — Area law officers and gang members will meet Tuesday in the first of what Walla Walla Police Chief Scott Bieber hopes will be many parleys.

The gang "call-in," as Bieber refers to the meeting, is the result of long-term planning and organization efforts he has spearheaded to address gang activity in the Walla Walla Valley.

Based on the groundbreaking work of David Kenney, a nationally known gang-abatement consultant, Bieber has outlined a three-step presentation aimed at curbing gang activity and providing other options for members.

Bieber said local law enforcement will present a united front, with representatives from Walla Walla, College Place and Milton-Freewater police departments, along with the Walla Walla County Sheriff's Office attending.

"I know (Walla Walla County Sheriff) John Turner is really excited about it," Bieber said, adding the assembled law enforcement agencies will present a unified gang crime enforcement plan.

"We all share some of the same gang personnel," said Milton-Freewater Police Chief Doug Boedigheimer. "It is prudent that we all get, and stay, on the same page philosophically as to how to handle these folks."

In addition to enforcement, Bieber said Walla Walla gang detectives will present a "moral voice" to gang members by giving the floor to parents of victims of gang violence.

Those presentations won't take center stage, however. The main emphasis of the meeting will be a kind of resource fair, according to Bieber.

"We can't enforce our way out of this problem," Bieber said.

In an interview earlier this year, Bieber outlined his goal of putting together a "Clearing House of Hope," a sort of one-stop shopping for local programs, services and outreach efforts that address gang-related issues.

Bieber said there are many available resources in the Walla Walla Valley, such as the Blue Mountain Action Council, the Youth Alliance and the Ink Out program, which gives gang members wanting to leave the life the opportunity to have tattoos medically removed.

"I think the gang initiative Chief Bieber has developed is good in that it approaches a societal problem eclectically," Boedigheimer said. "(It doesn't focus) solely on law enforcement, but includes services that could be available and helpful to gang people wanting help in leaving that lifestyle."

Bieber hopes eventually to have someone coordinating all the various resources in a way that will aid gang outreach efforts, but it hasn't happened yet, he said.

"This has to be an effort Valley wide," Bieber said. "My goal is to see a gang-free Valley."

Despite the amount of energy Bieber has devoted to organizing the call-in, he said he has modest hopes for the first meeting. He said he expects local gangs to be leery of the outreach effort.

"A lot of that is going to be based on the trust and relationships (gang officers) have built," Bieber said, expressing cautious optimism. "It's going to take a sustained effort. We're just going to keep doing it until we see some success."

The initial meeting will be held at St. Patrick Catholic Church and there will be free dessert, Bieber said.

"It's not a place where the cops are going to be coming in heavy handed," he added.

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