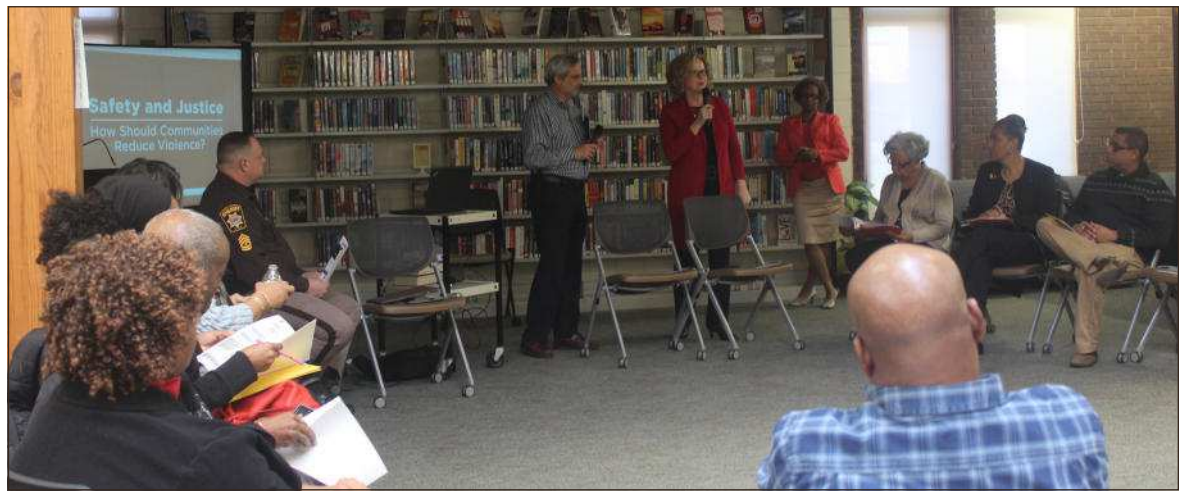




STAFF PHOTOS BY JESSI STICKEL

Charles County residents gathered at the P.D. Brown Library in Waldorf Saturday to discuss how the community can reduce violence by being able to talk to local law enforcement directly.



Brad Gottfried, former CSM president, his wife Linda Gottfried, and Tisha Tyler with Charles County Public Libraries lead the discussion, and said that they were pleased with the quality of the dialogue between different law enforcement agencies and citizens.

Community meets at Waldorf library to discuss decreasing violence

By JESSI STICKEL
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Many Charles County residents met Saturday for the first discussion on how communities can reduce violence at the Charles County Public Library, P.D. Brown Memorial branch.

The Southern Maryland Regional Library Association is hosting community discussions throughout the region this month surrounding the question, "How Should Communities Reduce Violence?"

Brad Gottfried, former president of the College of Southern Maryland, and his wife, Linda Gottfried, and Tisha Tyler, marketing and development manager for Charles County Public Library, led the discussion.

The discussion began with a short video, which showed attendees the three different options communities have to reduce violence: enforcing the law, applying the law fairly and de-escalate and prevent violence.

One woman suggested that there be more programs for older teens, ages 15-19, sponsored by police. She said she believes that there is a direct correlation between young people not being able to read and being incarcerated.

A Charles County resident of

47 years said that the community cannot expect the police to do everything, responsibility also relies on the citizens as well.

A woman who works in an incarceration center in Prince George's County said that she sees that a lot of women who are troubled and violent seems to stem from "family destruction in the home." She said that a lot of these women in jail did not grow up with a father, which lead them to end up in troubled relationships and bad situations.

One woman said that she did not think that more police on duty would decrease violence within the county; however, the presence of police might. She said that there needs to be more support for each other between police and residents.

"The core issue is respect," another woman said. "We look at each other as superior to each other, not human beings."

"Until we change thinking to understand that this person is a human just like I am, I am no more than he is, he is no less than I am; until we began to think in a way to treat each other as human beings with rights, desires — we have to get down to the essence of respecting each other," she said.

Charles County Sheriff's Office Supervisor of Community Police Tony Verdiglione said that there are about 300 police officers with the sheriff's office.

"That's about one police officer for every 500 residents," he said, which did not include the three separate shifts and detectives.

"We can't do it by ourselves; we most certainly need your help because we can't see everything all the time," Verdiglione said.

"From my perspective we are doing something right," another resident weighed in. She said that officers, including Sheriff Troy Berry (D), will visit students at schools, which is helping to break down that stigma that some have about police.

A resident said in her 94 years, she has not had one bad experience with the police. She said that she is very involved in her community, and works to catch crime near her home.

"Every time I called, the sheriff's office was there," she said.

Another resident said many people see the police as the enemy. She said many people are disrespectful to others, as well as to the police. She said respect needs to be taught at home.

"It starts at home," she said.

An attorney in Charles County said that this year already, she has three murder cases. She said she sees the crimes are more violent. However, she said there has to be an alternative to jail, when convicting teens and young adults of lesser crimes.

One resident said her concern with the legal system is that some of the younger people who commit crimes may not have the education to know their rights and know that they don't have to follow with what their public attorney wants.

Following the event, Brad Gottfried said he felt that people shared very deep emotions during the discussion and he loved the respect that everyone gave to each other. He said although everyone did not agree with each other it wasn't a tense situation.

Tyler said she was "very pleased" with the turnout of citizens that came to the discussion and was pleased with the quality of the conversation between citizens as well as from representatives of the sheriff's office and the public defender's office.

"We are always striving meet the needs of our community, and the dialog that happened confirmed that our community

was hungry for a conversation," Tyler said.

Gottfried said one "clear message" he heard from the discussion was a want and need for activities for youth. He said there are not many activities for youth in Charles County, outside of school, and it is something he is now going to work on.

Tyler added that she was thankful that the sheriff's office and the public defender's office was able to be there and engage in the discussion because citizens got to receive direct answers from the agencies.

"It also gave them an opportunity to hear from [citizens] directly," Tyler said.

She said now they have an idea of hosting a follow-up discussion and inviting more representatives from the state's attorney's office, the sheriff's office and the public defender's office. She said this will allow citizens to understand what each of those departments do, as well as being able to ask questions and get direct answers.

The following discussions are scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 27, at Calvert Library Prince Frederick at 9:30 a.m. and St. Mary's County Library's Lexington Park Branch at 2 p.m.

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