

# York police writing guns, gangs plan

## Murder victim's friends call for grassroots action

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Staff Writer

Friends of Luke "Shiesty" Marson know the perils of youth and gun violence all too well.

The 21-year-old Aurora rap artist was found shot to death on a dead-end street just north of Musselman's Lake nearly four years ago.

His killers have never been caught. Yesterday, close friends Jesse Organ and Ryan Pyziak came to York Regional Police headquarters in Newmarket to hear police talk about youth crime, gangs and guns.

They wanted to make sure their friend is not forgotten and their voices are heard.

Police say while the region doesn't have a major gun, gang or youth crime issue, they are developing a strategy to combat the problem before it escalates.

"We don't have the same problem they have in Toronto, but it can happen here," Chief Armand La Barge said.

"We've seen some instances where it has happened here and I think the citizens want to see us doing everything we can to prevent it from happening here."

Mr. Marson's friends hope police act fast and said they are willing to volunteer their time to help.

"Even a little bit of a problem is enough of a problem," Mr. Organ said.

"There are guns in York Region, they're already here, look what happened to our friend," Mr. Pyziak said.

"The problem is kids are listening to rappers like 50 Cent, not police, teachers and preachers in a church. What they need is to hear the voices from the streets telling them the right path to go down and that's why we're here."

*Police can't do it alone. The gangs are a part of our community and it takes the entire community to address the problem.*

Approximately 32 per cent of York Region residents are younger than 23.

That's 288,000 youth, but police say less than one per cent of them are involved with gangs.

Police intelligence shows there are approximately 340 gangs in Canada, with 22 per cent operating in the GTA.

Because of competition and families relocating here, more gang members have been moving to the 905 area.

In fact, police intelligence shows there are approximately 130 gang members operating in York and another 76 associate gang members, mostly in the southern part of the region, Insp. Tom Carrique said.

Having consulted with police in New York, Boston and Arizona about how they've attacked gangs, guns and youth crime, York cops hope to combine enforcement with mentoring and supervision programs as well as other initiatives to help youth make intelligent choices.

"We're not going to arrest our way out of a crime problem and if we want to solve this issue, we have to go deeper," Insp. Paul Pederson said.

Right now, Insp. Pederson says the force is "well positioned" to prevent an escalation of youth crime and gang issues because of the prevention programs in place.

The next step, he said, is to build a

strategy by building on partnerships with schools and community agencies.

New ground needs to be broken by allowing community and youth voices to be heard, Insp. Pederson said.

In the coming months, police will embark on field research initiatives, focus groups and community consultation efforts involving youth voices.

That includes hosting a May 16 forum at the Community Safety Village in

Whitchurch-Stouffville, where all are welcome.

"Police can't do it alone," Insp. Carrique said. "The gangs are a part of our community and it takes the entire community to address the problem."



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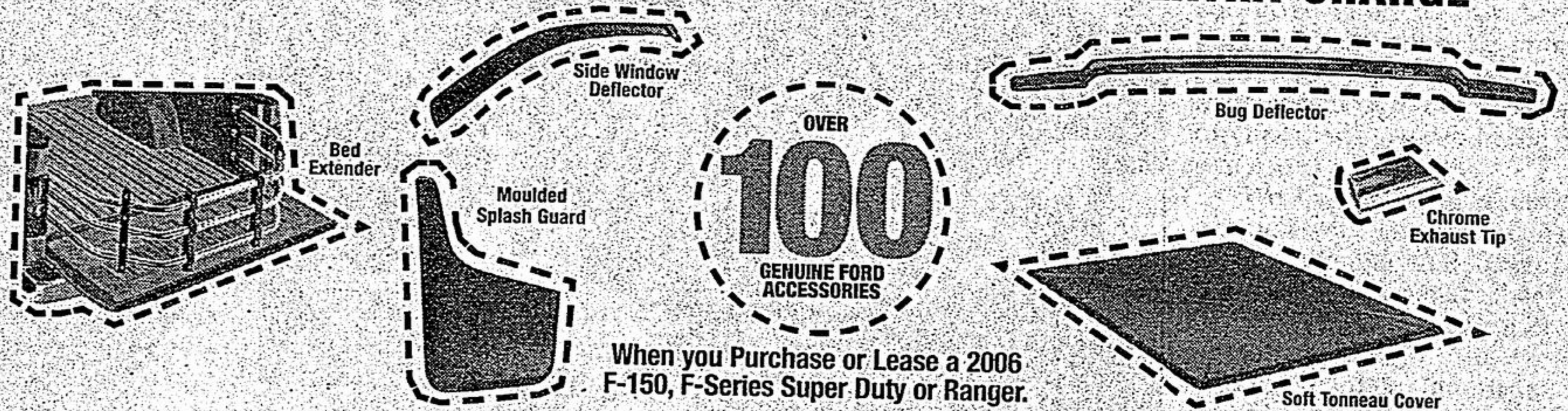
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