

Sheriff's Office Encourages Groups To Apply For Grants

CONFISCATED CRIMINAL MONEY USED FOR FUND

By JILL KING GREENWOOD and KEITH MORELLI
The Tampa Tribune

TAMPA — The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office is encouraging community groups to apply for thousands of dollars in grant money.

The giveaway is called the Community Enrichment Grant Program and has been an annual event for the past three years, said community relations section Cpl. Danny Tewmey. Organizations can apply for up to \$1,500.

"The money comes from a law enforcement trust fund," he said. "It's confiscated from criminals as the result of seizures or property that has been sold.

"The money is from bad guys," he said.

Last year, about \$30,000 was given away in various increments. Nineteen nonprofit groups received \$1,500 grants, and six got grants ranging from \$500 to \$1,200.

Some 60 organizations applied for the grants last year, he said.

The sheriff's office began accepting the applications Tuesday. The deadline is March 19. Only nonprofit groups are eligible, and the grant must be spent to benefit the community, Tewmey said.

For example, some of the grant money was used by an east Hillsborough Little League to buy new fencing and landscaping for the park where the teams play.

"That was something the whole community could enjoy," he said.

All the applications are reviewed by a board that decides who gets the grants and how much. The board is made up of

deputies from all four districts, a representative from the community relations section and four representatives from various communities throughout the county.

Some organizations will get the full \$1,500, others only a few hundred dollars, Tewmey said.

"They have to document what they want in the application," Tewmey said. "Not everybody gets the cash."

Grants may be for improvements to parks, community buildings, common areas and projects that encourage community involvement.

A Ruskin environmental group used the \$1,500 grant to teach 50 children how to fish. The cash bought poles, tackle and bait. A church in Progress Village used \$1,300 to buy tricycles for children at the day

care center. Typically, the grant money goes to organizations that fix up parks or community centers.

By law, the sheriff's office must give 15 percent of money seized from criminals to nonprofit groups. The remaining money is used to purchase equipment for the department.

Before 2000, the department awarded the money to the Junior Deputy Program, the county's Neighborhood Watch program and Cease Fire Tampa Bay. But deputies later opened up the program to the community, and applications flooded in.

To obtain an application, call (813) 247-8115.

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