

Pen or Pencil youth remind community: Thou Shall Not Kill

By Michael S. Lee

Of The Commercial Staff

Pine Bluff residents are being reminded of the Biblical admonition against murder thanks to the efforts of students participating in a local youth empowerment program who recently placed signs reading 'Respect for Life Thou Shall Not Kill Campaign' throughout the area.

Pine Bluff Interested Citizens for Voter Registration Executive Director Rev. Jesse C. Turner, whose organization sponsors the Pen or Pencil program for youth, said the signs are intended to bring attention to the epidemic of gun violence in the city and to advertise the May 4 Children's March Against Gun Violence and for Mentors.

"We are really concerned about the gun violence in Pine Bluff," Turner said. "The homicide rate in Pine Bluff is seven times the national average. We are tying together our efforts against gun violence and the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Children's March on Birmingham, Ala. with a march of our own for the young people in the Pen or Pencil program. They've had an opportunity to learn about the civil rights movement through their participation in the program."

The Pen or Pencil program is for young people aged 12 to 19 who commit to non-violence, community service and staying drug free. The program's stated goals are to help youth to gain an appreciation for community service through teamwork and in the process empower them to make the right decisions in life. There is no charge for membership.

Turner said students from Robert F. Morehead Middle School in the Dollarway School District as well as students from Southeast Middle School, Belair Middle School and Jack Robey Junior High School in the Pine Bluff School District are participants in the Pen or Pencil program.

"We are going to the regional youth summit in Little Rock in June," Turner said. "The organizers are hoping to get U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to attend. He wants to talk to young people to find out what they think needs to be done to fight against gun violence. We are planning for him to talk to students because of the high degree of gun violence in Pine Bluff. In August we will be going to Washington, D.C., to participate in the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington."

