

## LOCAL NEWS



STEVEN R. NICKERSON/Detroit Free Press

Linda Clark of Flint, whose husband was slain, shows the stack of signed petitions requesting that lawmakers get tougher with criminals.

# Slaying victim's wife wants laws toughened

BY LORI MATHEWS  
Free Press Staff Writer

She has seen the video a hundred times, but Linda Clark's face fills with anger as the kids charged in her husband's murder face a judge while laughing and joking — as if on a game show instead of on trial.

"Look at that. Can you believe it?" asks Clark as she sits on her living room floor, shaking her head. "Every day I try to explain to two tiny children why these boys took their father away from them. And there they sit, laughing, because they know nothing's going to happen to them."

Kevin Clark, 37, of Richfield Township, was shot to death by fleeing robbers May 10 at a neighborhood market where he stopped — as he did almost every night — to buy candy for his children. The trial for the five young men charged in Clark's death is under way in Genesee County. At the time of their arrest in May, one was 15, and the other four were 17.

After her 6-year-old son, Wesley, asked, "Why didn't somebody stop it, Momma?" Clark said she wanted to take action. The 34-year-old Richfield Township woman is leading a petition drive that asks lawmakers to reconsider how Michigan deals with youthful offenders, as well as other criminals.

"This is a wake-up call to our legislators," Clark said Tuesday. "I've heard from people from all over the state. They're not pulling the trigger, but lawmakers are basically playing Russian roulette with our lives."

"We want something done now. We want to live lives without fear."

In five weeks, Clark has received hundreds of letters and more than 20,000 petition signatures.

"She has a gift for reaching people," said Sen. William Van Regenmorter, R-Hudsonville, who has met with Clark frequently. "What I admire most is that she has suffered a horrible tragedy and has decided to use that experience to help others. It's given real meaning to her husband's life, and death."

One of the people touched by Clark's campaign was Flint resident Jeanne Johnson, who wrote a letter of support to her.

"I wrote her because Linda Clark is speaking for all of us. We're sick of what's happening in our society," said Johnson, 53. "Criminals are getting a slap on the wrist while victims' lives change forever. What she's trying to do is at least a start."

The teenagers charged with killing Kevin Clark are part of an increasing number of juveniles arrested for murder.

According to a national study by Northeastern University in Boston, juvenile crime increased at an alarming rate from 1985-91.

The biggest rise involved the arrest of 15-year-olds for murder, which rose



Kevin Clark

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LINDA CLARK

217 percent. The arrests of boys 12 and under had increased by 100 percent. During the same period, the number of 17-year-olds arrested for murder climbed 121 percent; the number of 16-year-olds, 158 percent.

According to the study, the number of teenagers arrested for murder more than doubled from 1984-91 — 969 in 1984 to 2,202 in '91.

"We have some awful crimes being committed by an awful lot of damaged young people who will do it again and again, unless they get help," said Wayne County Probate Judge James Lacey. "We need to separate these children from society and address their problems."

"Think about it. The average life span for a young man is 72 years. Are we prepared to incur the costs of incarcerating a 15-year-old for six or seven decades?"

"There has to be a better way. We have to find it and be committed to it now."

To obtain a Clark petition, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: Linda Clark; PO Box 171; Genesee 48437.

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Dear Friend,

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*Wanda F. Wilho*

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