

Woman who saved girl from killer will be at the Kids Safety Fair in Moscow today

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By David Johnson of the Tribune

Amber Deahn will be at the Officer Newbill Kids Safety Fair in Moscow today....
Smith and Cannon

MOSCOW - The woman credited with saving young Shasta Groene from serial killer Joseph E. Duncan has endorsed and will attend the annual Officer Newbill Kids Safety Fair here today at the Eastside Marketplace.

Amber Deahn, a former Coeur d'Alene Denny's restaurant waitress, gained worldwide media attention in 2005, after she recognized 8-year-old Groene in the company of Duncan and stalled them until authorities could arrive and make an arrest.

"Mostly, it boils down to paying attention," Deahn, 29, said of her noticing the little girl in a booth as the missing daughter of a family that was found bludgeoned to death. "Like most people, before all this happened, I didn't pay much attention. It was like the unseen danger."

Deahn now lives in Moscow with her three small children. In addition to starting her own nonprofit foundation called Guardians of Innocence, she has joined ranks with Jon Kimberling, a local insurance agent and former city councilor, to promote the safety fair as another means of educating people to the ways of pedophiles and others who prey on children.

"The whole idea of naming it Guardians of Innocence is because children are the embodiment of innocence," Deahn said. "They don't know anything. They just speak their mind because they're innocent of everything."

Kimberling said Deahn's participation underscores the importance of the safety fair. "Amber has been on every major TV channel since this happened," Kimberling said of the Groene case and subsequent Duncan murder conviction. "She got fired up doing stuff for kids."

Duncan pleaded guilty in 2007 to 10 federal counts involving kidnapping and torture of Shasta and her brother, Dylan Groene. He also pleaded guilty to murdering Dylan at a remote campsite. Duncan had a long history of being a sexual predator.

The safety fair, Kimberling said, actually started before the Groene family deaths. "And it just got bigger and bigger." Then, in 2007, Moscow Police Officer Lee Newbill was gunned down by a man who killed four people, including himself.

"He (Newbill) worked at the safety fair every year," Kimberling said. "So we got permission from his family to name it after him."

The fair, Kimberling explained, runs from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and is free for children, adults and families. In addition to a bike rodeo and other events, free bike helmets will be given away. Kimberling said there will be booths where parents can learn about amber alerts and a software program called Managing Information on Lost Kids. A CD will be available that teaches children how to escape from burning buildings. Identification stickers for the inside of helmets and car seats will be available. Gun

locks will be available for families who own firearms. Bike tune-ups will be offered, and Gritman Medical Center will be participating. A mountain bike will also be raffled.

"I think Amber's story is a compelling story," Kimberling said, "and this has turned into a fantastic event."

Deahn agreed, saying one of the reasons she decided to participate is because the fair started before she became the focus of media attention and local people made it what it has become. She said she's just lending whatever help she can.

"Educate, educate, educate," Deahn said, explaining that her foundation is being set up out of California to work with law enforcement agencies. "I'm part of the safety committee," she said of her involvement with the kids safety fair. "My little niche is helping handle the children identification kits and DNA and fingerprinting."

Deahn said teaching children and their parents about sexual predators is essential to preventing repeats of the Groene family ordeal.

"I don't think there's another creature on the planet you could compare a pedophile to," Deahn said. "They are the worst kind of predator because they evolve."

After Shasta Groene was rescued and Duncan arrested, Deahn said she began doing research on sex offenders and pedophiles. After being questioned and interviewed by media outlets around the world, Deahn said she began to learn something about herself. "I actually have a knack for noticing little details. And I want to pass that on to other people."

She remembered when Duncan and Shasta Groene came into the restaurant, the girl seemed familiar. But she was uncertain. So she kept trying to make the connection, and then decided it was worth alerting authorities. To stall, she talked with Shasta and Duncan and convinced the little girl to have a milk shake. Then she took her time making a large milk shake, and even apologized for the delay.

By the time police arrived, Duncan had apparently become nervous and asked for his check. Officers took him into custody and Deahn recalls simply sitting down and holding Shasta, who broke into tears.

"I couldn't help myself," Deahn told CNN in an interview shortly after the incident. "I picked her straight up and just held her."

Deahn said she doesn't want to create an atmosphere of fear. She points out the vast majority of people pose no threat. "You don't have to be afraid of everybody. Be afraid of the right people. Don't punish the good people. There are truly a great number of good people."

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