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# OPELIKA-AUBURN NEWS WEEKEND

Saturday, December 13, 2025

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## 22 GANG-RELATED ARRESTS



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Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones speaks at a press conference at the Lee County Sheriff's Office in Opelika on Thursday, Dec. 11, 2025, regarding recent gang-related arrests in Lee County.

### Sheriff's office part of multi-agency investigation

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Several arrests were made in a large multi-agency investigation into a local gang that has ties to the United Blood Nation gang, the Lee County Sheriff's Office announced on Thursday.

There were 22 arrests made in Operation Gang Shield, an investigation into the alleged criminal activity associated with a gang known as "Sex, Money, Murder," Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones said. The individuals arrested face a total of 79 criminal charges that include alleged "violations under the Alabama Criminal Enterprise Prevention Act, violent offenses, firearms-related offenses, fraud-related offenses, and narcotics-related offenses," authorities said.

"The idea of this investigation was to identify the individuals involved, disrupt their activities, and to make arrests and bring these people to justice, which would, in turn, of course, accomplish our overall mission and goal of keeping our communities safe," Jones said.

Jones announced the arrests at a press

conference at the Lee County Sheriff's Office on Thursday. He said the arrests were tied to the Alabama Criminal Enterprises Prevention Act, which was enacted by the Alabama legislature in 2023. Jones said the law was enacted because "there was a lack of a tool that law enforcement could use that would really bring to the forefront our ability to confront and deal with gang issues in our communities."

Jones said SMM was a faction of the United Blood Nation, which is also known as the East Coast Bloods. The United Blood Nation was founded in the late 1980s in New York City and the gang is known for its hierarchical structure and involvement in violent crime, narcotics offenses, and organized criminal conspiracies across multiple states, authorities said. SMM has expanded its footprint into smaller communities throughout the southeastern United States in recent years, authorities said.

Jones said the faction would "focus on recruiting individuals into their gang membership and also maintaining their current memberships." The Criminal En-

terprises Prevention Act makes it a felony to compel someone to join a street gang, Jones said.

Beginning in May, investigators from the Lee County Sheriff's Office initiated an investigation into SMM and worked with state and federal law enforcement partners. Jones said the investigation was sparked by information coming from different sources that gave the office cause for concern but it also became clear that the 2023 law could be applied.

Jones said the suspects were involved in "not only compelling others to basically force them into gang membership, but also involved in fraud investigations and fraud crimes, narcotics and other issues."

During the execution of search warrants in this investigation, authorities said eight firearms were seized. Authorities said that some of the firearms have been connected to various shootings in Alabama, and other evidence of ongoing organized criminal activity in other states.

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### LEE COUNTY SCHOOLS

## LCS received its top score on state report card

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The state report cards from the Alabama State Accountability System were started nearly a decade ago, and this year, Lee County Schools received its highest grade since the system began.

Lee County Schools received an 87 overall, nine points higher than the 78 it received in 2017, with several schools improving their grades. The grade was for the system's work from last year, which was LCS Superintendent Mike Howard's first year at the helm, and while he maintained

that the grade is not the end-all-be-all for what LCS does, it does show that they are going in the right direction.

"It's not a true indication of what we do, but it does make me feel good that we're having a positive impact," Howard said. "It's not just me. I mean, it's my team. My

team around me are phenomenal people that work hard every day, that want to do what's right for kids, and when you surround yourself with those types of people, it's amazing what you can accomplish."

Please see LCS, Page A2

**Weather**  
Clouds and sun; pleasant  
**High 67 • Low 45**  
FORECAST • A10

**Inside**

Business	B5	Lively	D1	Puzzles	D6
Classifieds	C9	Nation/World	B1	Sports	C1
Comics	D3	Opinion	A4	Weather	A10

