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## Attacks on Mormons prompt Mesa forum on hate crimes

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In the wake of recent attacks on Mormons in the East Valley, the Mesa Police Department hosts a community forum about hate crimes tonight.

Bill Strauss with the Arizona Anti-Defamation League defines a hate crime.

``It's a crime motivated in part or in whole by the victim's real or perceived belonging to one of the protected groups," Strauss says.

He believes that the recent attacks on Mormons may have had something to do with the raid by Texas authorities on a polygamous compound of fundamentalist Mormons near Eldorado, Texas.

``We have noticed, in at least one school, an up-tick in anti-Mormon graffiti," Strauss said. ``I am starting to think that maybe the prominence in the headlines has got people thinking along the lines of the Mormon faith and what makes them different."

Strauss and Terrea Arnwine of the East Valley chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People will be among the participants in tonight's forum.

The forum comes less than 10 days after two Gilbert teens were attacked as they sat in a park near Elliot and McQueen Roads. Police said they were shot at with a pellet gun, then attacked physically and verbally by two other teens, who asked the victims whether they were Mormon.

The suspects, later arrested and turned over to juvenile authorities, made anti-Mormon statements, police said, adding they had carved swastikas into their skin on the inside of their wrists.

The suspects face charges of aggravated assault, disorderly conduct and illegal consumption of alcohol.

Tonight's forum will be from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Mesa Public Safety Training Facility, 3260 N. 40th St.