

BUILDING BRIDGES: Alton Police, YWCA, A Precious Organization host event to reach area youth

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - For some time now, the **Alton Police Department** has been working to



build bridges in the community and reach out to young people.

On Saturday at the **Alton YWCA**, thanks to a sponsorship by the A Precious Organization and the YWCA, several police officers and their chief were able to do just that. The event was appropriately called "**Ballin' With A Cop.**"

One of the keys about the event, called was to pay tribute and remember Romell Jones, an 11-year-old boy, who was shot and killed waiting to be picked up from basketball practice in Alton.

The time was filled with fun basketball activities, some discussion, pizza and drinks along with an opportunity for the police to attempt to reach the youngsters in attendance. The goal was for the younger people to be able to view the officers outside of uniform and see they are real people just like them, **Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons** said.

A Precious Organization and The YWCA of Alton invite the kids in our community to come out and have fun, eat pizza and play a scrimmage game of basketball with the Alton Police Department. A Precious Organization was formed in 2013 by **Tammy Smith**. It works to help children in the community and has done a considerable amount for Sickle Cell Anemia fund-raising.

YWCA Executive Director Andrea Lamer said she was proud to host such a positive community event on Saturday.



“We are excited we had the **Alton Police Department** here,” she said. “It is a chance for the Alton Police to get to know the kids and the kids to get to know them. The police are really interested in protecting everyone in the community and want the kids to know they are invested in them. This is also an effort on the part of Tammy Smith’s Precious organization after the shooting of Romell.”

Alton Mayor Brant Walker said he viewed Saturday as another example of the city trying to build back bridges in the community with young people.

"We want to make our community safer and the way to do that is with good touch points with the police," he said. "It doesn't get any better than this."

Lt. John Franke led the Alton Police efforts on Saturday and said it was a very worthwhile effort.

"It is good to do something positive in the community and show we are just like any other person," Franke said.

Lamer said she hopes events like the one Saturday with the Alton Police help lead to more cooperation with them and the community in general working to make Alton a safer place.

Chief Simmons said he was very pleased to have the event on Saturday with an abundance of youth activities and the officers being and to interact with youngsters in the community.

“We had about several officers and police explorers take part,” he said. “Hopefully this will be another way of building bridges with the youth in the community and showing them we are there to help them. This was a good start in that direction.”

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