

Chief Simmons discusses domestic violence

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
November 5 2016 9:50 AM



ALTON - October was **National Domestic Violence Awareness Month**.

This fact is often overshadowed by the prevalence of pink for **Breast Cancer Awareness** and black and orange for Halloween, but **Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons** said he only breaks his dress code for one reason - a purple shirt. Purple is the color of domestic violence awareness. Simmons wears a purple shirt, instead of a white one,

every year with his dress uniform while speaking at the **Madison County Domestic Violence Memorial Service**.

The service has been held for over a decade and remembers all **Madison County** residents who have died as a result of domestic violence. It is sponsored by the **Oasis Women's Center** in Alton. Simmons said the county was fortunate this year, and in 2015, to have no deaths due to domestic violence. In 2014, however, a woman was dismembered by her boyfriend and her body was dumped in Calhoun County. Her death was a direct result of domestic violence, and could have been prevented, Simmons said.

"It is an awareness memorial service," he said. "It is making people aware of things like an incidence of domestic violence occurs every nine seconds. That means every nine seconds, a woman or a man is beaten as a result of domestic violence."

The service was held Oct. 12 in the chapel of **Alton Memorial Hospital**. Simmons said he has spoken at it for the last four years, since he has been the Alton Police Chief. He said other community officials such as **Illinois Representative Dan Beiser** and **Madison County Coroner Steve Nonn** speak at it regularly as well.

"Your heart feels full when you leave there," Simmons said. "In these speeches, my comment I usually make is, 'love should make you blush, it shouldn't make you bruise.'"

Simmons said his administration has seen the **Alton Police Department** and Madison County as a whole become better at preventing and addressing cases of domestic violence.

"Domestic violence is not a taboo subject anymore," he said. "Now, you have to come out and report it. It could save somebody's life."

Breaking the cycle of violence is also an important mission for Simmons. He believes that damaging cycle is only aided by a violent culture, which includes television and video games.

"We have to teach stability to youth," he said. "A lot of kids grow up seeing domestic violence, and it creates another generation of kids abusive to their significant others. There are video games out there giving out points for battering women. That is ridiculous. People need to boycott and monitor kids' video games. Video games are a conduit for violence."



One topic of Simmons's speech at the memorial was the danger of police officers involved with domestic violence calls. Alton native and **St. Louis County Police Officer Blake Snyder** was responding to a domestic violence call when he was murdered. Days later, two officers from Palm Springs, California were shot while responding to a similar call.

"A lot of officer-related shootings and injuries are responding to domestic violence issues," Simmons said. "Whenever patrol officers get the call, automatically, the hair sticks up on the back of their necks, and they go in prepared to protect themselves and everyone else there."

To prepare for these calls, officers of the Alton Police Department have all taken crisis intervention training. All law enforcement in Madison County adhere to new countywide protocol for handling domestic violence situations. This protocol includes taking photographs upon arrival, giving people information about protecting themselves against their abusers using the law and helping victims find a safe place to stay.

Usually, Simmons helps put together a **Domestic Violence Awareness Walk** in October. The walk goes from **Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic Church** on **State Street** to the **Liberty Bank Riverfront Amphitheater**. This year, however, Simmons said the committee could not secure an October date for the amphitheater, and did not want to

risk harsh November weather. The walk will take place this coming March, and Simmons said they were going to work to make it a larger event.