

An uptick of violence: Alton police chief discusses local and national shootings

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - As many as 58 police officers have been shot and killed in the line of duty in 2016, including **San Antonio, Texas Officer Benjamin Marconi**, 50, who was assassinated while writing a traffic ticket Sunday, Nov. 20.

Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons said the uptick in violence against police officers is "unnerving." He said as many as nine police officers in the **St. Louis Metro Area** have been assaulted since July. The most recent account involved a **St. Louis Police Department** sergeant who was shot in the face twice in an ambush in the early hours of Monday morning. These shootings bring back fresh memories of **St. Louis County Police Officer** and Alton area native **Blake Snyder**, who was murdered while responding to a domestic violence call on the morning of Oct. 6.

"It's very unnerving," Simmons said. "My officers will keep doing what we're doing to solve crimes, including recent shootings near **Ridge Street**. Without community support, however, it is hard for us to solve these crimes. It's time for people to take back their neighborhoods."

Those recent shootings Simmons referenced took place on Nov. 7 and Nov. 15. In each incident, police were called to the area after shots were fired. Simmons said the shootings took place between two individuals, with as many as 15 shots being fired in the Nov. 15 incident. During the Nov. 7 incident, an Alton police officer's vehicle was nearly hit by a stray bullet. That officer was in an unmarked vehicle at the time and was not believed to be the intended target.

Simmons said an arrest is "imminent" in those cases over the course of this week. He said his department has a "couple of suspects," and is applying for charges on an unnamed individual in the near future. Simmons said the amount of gun-related crimes in Alton is actually lower this year than last. He said the area usually experiences an "uptick" in such crimes in proximity to the holiday season.

While these local shootings and the national violence trend involving police officers seem to be daunting, Simmons said he has faith in his department and the community of Alton. A groundbreaking community police study being conducted by former **St. Louis Police Chief Daniel Isom** and the **University of Missouri St. Louis** is currently entering its second phase, which requires community involvement.

During the first phase, every employee of the **Alton Police Department** - from police officers to desk workers to jailers and janitors - were asked to anonymously complete a survey about the department's operations. Those answers were added to an extensive crime map with detailed reports dating from 2006 to the present.

The second phase requires members of the community to complete a similar survey, which can be found at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AltonCommunityPolicing>. Chief Simmons invites all residents of Alton to complete that survey in order for his department to know what the community needs and expects from them.

"It's a dangerous time that we live in all around the country," Simmons said. "We appreciate the outpouring of support from the community when an officer is in need. We encourage everyone to get online and complete that survey. If your suggestion makes us better at our jobs, that will be great for everyone."

A fundraiser for the family of Officer Snyder will take place on Nov. 26 from 6 p.m.-midnight at the **Alton-Wood River Sportsmen's Club**, located at 3109 Godfrey Rd. in

Godfrey. It will have live bands, a live auction, and 100 percent of the proceeds will benefit the Snyder family. Tickets to the event are \$25 and include a draft beer.