

Fists Up, Guns Down organizer charged with multiple gun and drug related felonies

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - A man who organized a grassroots effort to quell gun violence in Alton has been charged with multiple felonies; including gun and drug-related charges.

Brian E. Newman, 25, was charged on March 2, 2017, ([the day after this story regarding his effort of Fists Up, Guns Down was posted on RiverBender.com](#)) with six separate offenses for gun and drug-related charges. During an interview with a reporter from RiverBender.com with both **Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons** and Alton mayoral candidate **Joshua Young**, Newman told a reporter he was helping people settle disputes through boxing matches instead of resorting to guns.

The week following that interview, however, Newman was charged with the following list of felonies by the **Madison County State's Attorney's Office**:

- **Armed Habitual Criminal (Class X)**: in that said defendant possessed a firearm after having been convicted of the offenses of Aggravated Unlawful Use of a Weapon and the offense of Unlawful Possession of Weapons by a Felon...
- **Possession of Weapons by a Felon (Class 2)**: in that said defendant, a person who has been convicted of the offense of Unlawful Possession of Weapons by a Felon, a felony under the law of Illinois, in the Circuit Court of Madison County, knowingly possessed on or about his person a Beretta .40 caliber semiautomatic handgun...
- **Methamphetamine Trafficking (Class 2)**: in that said defendant knowingly brought into this state methamphetamine for the purpose of delivery of methamphetamine or with the intent to deliver methamphetamine, other than as authorized in the Methamphetamine Control and Community Protection Act...
- **Unlawful Delivery of Methamphetamine (Class 2)**: in that said defendant knowingly and unlawfully delivered to S/A Dave Baybordi less than five grams of a substance containing methamphetamine other than authorized in the Methamphetamine Control and Community Protection Act...

Newman was also charged for a Jan. 25, 2017, offense of delivering methamphetamine, also a Class 2 felony, as well as a Feb. 28, 2017, offense of delivering methamphetamine - still a Class 2 felony.

After the story regarding Newman's efforts ran, RiverBender.com was alerted to the charges by both Simmons and Young, who both asserted the mission of Fists Up, Guns Down would continue. Simmons said Newman's charges were a result of an investigation by an arm of the **Illinois State Police, Metropolitan Enforcement Group of Southwestern Illinois (MEGSI)**, so he was not aware of the allegations against Newman. Young said the same.

Newman does have an extensive criminal background, but that information was not included in the previous article regarding Fists Up, Guns Down due to the belief criminals go through the criminal justice program to be rehabilitated, and once time is served, they can again contribute to the community.

That being said, these are not the first charges leveled against Newman for gun-related crimes. In fact, the **Alton Police Department** is well-aware of Newman's criminal history. On July 9, 2012, Newman was named in a shooting on the Alton Police Department's Facebook page.

"Due to recent new leads, detectives were able to continue an investigating a shooting that occurred on May 22, 2012. The investigation resulted in the charge of two subjects.

"The first subject is Brian E. Newman, who has claimed to live in the 7300 block of Carroll St., Belleville. Newman was charged with Armed Habitual Criminal, Aggravated Discharge of a Firearm and Unlawful Possession of Weapons by a Felon. Newman is accused of discharging a firearm towards another person."



Both Simmons and Young lament at Newman's recent charges. Simmons said he has hoped Newman would have reformed since his younger years, and said he would still work toward the efforts Newman claimed to have started with Fists Up, Guns Down.

"This is a worthwhile program and I will continue to support it," Simmons said.

"However, like any program dealing with kids, we still have to vet the workers and volunteers when it is going."

Young was more passionate about the continuation of the movement saying, "Just because the man who said he organized it is in jail doesn't mean we're going to stop. It doesn't matter who started it or where he is, it matters what we keep doing, and we're going to keep doing it."

A meeting of local martial arts trainers is being conducted by Young, he said. The purpose of that meeting will be how to best approach the situation and the movement. He said Simmons has been "extremely supportive" of continuing the movement.

If Young has his way, at-risk youth and people in neighborhoods who need a creative or athletic vent for their frustrations will have access to martial arts training including, boxing, kickboxing and even Tai Chi for the purpose of sportsmanship, exercise and general wellness. He is looking to the community to host such a place.

During a meeting with Newman, Young, Simmons and **Alton Police Department Chaplain Jason Harrison**, Harrison offered **Deliverance Temple** for the purposes of youth training and community wellness, saying the church would open its basketball courts for people wanting to play, even saying it would provide food for people as they did. This would ensure people in the neighborhood, especially children, were supervised by community leaders as they partook in constructive after school activities.

In response to the news of Newman's most recent arrest, Harrison said the following via text message:

"Winston Churchill quoted, 'Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.' Some have been very successful in our city and quit because their work. Some have failed and quit because of shame. I will say now it was take us courageous ones to continue the work."

Unfortunately, however, those bright hopes for a neighborhood exercise and wellness center have suffered a bump through a grassroots organizer being charged with gun crimes - the exact sort of thing his movement claimed to be working to stop.

Newman was reluctant to move the program to a location, preferring instead to "keep it to the streets." Simmons said his department would not assist the movement unless it was placed somewhere safe and had adequate funding for insurance. If those conditions were to be met, he said his department may donate safety equipment to the group, including boxing helmets, gloves and mouth guards.

Both Simmons and **Alton Mayor Brant Walker** celebrated the sportsmanship and athletic potential a boxing program could offer, but each said the program had a long way to go before it would receive administrative support - most importantly insurance coverage and a safe place to put such a program with well-vetted people and trainers.

Hopefully, the optimism shared by both Simmons and Young, who rarely see eye-to-eye on many issues, will be rewarded by continued grassroots efforts to improve that area of the community - which is often referred to as "**Little Mexico**" - with continuing support from both the neighborhoods and the police department. Ultimately, such initiatives are the goals of the "groundbreaking" community police program instituted by former **St. Louis Police Chief Daniel Isom** through the **University of Missouri St. Louis**.

Newman could not be reached at this time for a comment.