

# Local police departments received more than \$20k as a result of Mustache March event

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**ALTON** - Eight police departments from across the Riverbend received checks for at least \$1,000 from Mustache March organizers Tuesday evening at Bluff City Grill.

Mustache March was an event organized by Steve Schwegel, owner of Alton Physical Therapy, with the help of Riverbender.com Sales Associate Johnny Aguirre and RiverBend Growth Association (RBGA) member Monica Bristow, among others. It was designed to give positive feedback to local police departments. During the month of March, several police officers and event organizers sported mustaches and shirts featuring the "Thin Blue Line" flag throughout the month of March.

Schwegel said he was initially worried the event would not receive enough sponsors, but soon found, through the work of fellow organizers, many people and business owners across the Riverbend were willing to donate to local police departments. Those donations totaled more than \$20,000, which was distributed to various local police departments. Schwegel and Aguirre said the money should be used for either community outreach or officer safety, though added it was given without condition.

"We wanted to do this to show appreciation for our officers," Schwegel said prior to the check distribution. "Whenever the media covers police, it seems it's usually bad. I think about 99 percent of people appreciate our police departments, and would like to show that."

Aguirre distributed eight checks Tuesday night, but was unable to deliver a \$500 check to the Hartford Police Department, because it did not send a representative to the event.

Detective Sgt. Christian Cranmer of the East Alton Police Department received a check for \$1,000, which he said would be promptly placed on his chief's desk upon his return to the station.

Lt. James Goeken of the Madison County Sheriff's Office received a check for \$1,000 on behalf of the entire office. Goeken is the head of Godfrey operations for the sheriff's office. Godfrey contracts police protection to the sheriff's office instead of operating its own police force. Goeken said the money would go towards a new canine unit in the future.

The acting police chief of Brighton received a check for \$1,000, and described it as "unexpected," adding he was unsure how the money would be utilized in his department.

Bunker Hill Police Chief Jacob Welch agreed his \$1,000 was also unexpected, but said Bunker Hill has a police cruiser lacking a dashboard-mounted camera, adding Bunker Hill has not yet had such a device. He said the money would most likely go toward procuring one of those.

Deputy Chief Dan Bunt of Wood River received a check for \$2,000, which he said may also be used for a dash-cam, but his fellow officers said it may also be utilized in the unexpected case of an officer being harmed in the line of duty, or having a serious family illness. In case of such dire circumstances, that money could be used to help the officer and his or her family.

Assistant Police Chief Lt. Craig Welch of Bethalto accepted a gift of \$2,000, and said the department has been fortunate to have attained several major items, including a new digital fingerprint scanner. Welch said he would consider using the money to train new scouts and/or deliver at least a portion of it to the Lifesavers group at Civic Memorial High School.

Craig Welch said that group intervenes with students across the area who may be suffering through desperate times of emotional crisis. That \$2,000, he said, could send them to different training classes and seminars with the goal of making them more effective at their work.

PJ Bennet of the Alton Police Department received a \$7,000 donation, which he said would go to the department's benevolent protective association to continue many community outreach programs it does each year, such as Shop with a Cop, food baskets for Thanksgiving and maintaining the youth camp. He also said some of the money may be used to send the department's honor guard to Washington, D.C. to honor the memory of St. Louis County Police Officer Blake Snyder - an Alton area native - who was killed in the line of duty last year.

Jerseyville's police department received the biggest donation - a whopping \$8,100. Jerseyville Police Chief Brad Blackorby said that sum would go towards the department attaining a new canine officer. Its current one, while still certified, is 13 years old and ready to retire. Blackorby said many departments across the area, from Alton to Litchfield, have asked to borrow the use of his department's canine officer.

Schwegel, Aguirre and Bristow said Mustache March will be an annual event henceforth, and will only expand its reach as well as the departments benefiting from it.

