

Bonding over basketball: Third Ballin' with the Cops brings community and police together

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
May 15 2017 9:01 AM



ALTON - A few weeks after a young, up-and-coming basketball player, Romell Jones, 11, was killed outside his home in Alton Acres at the beginning of 2016, appointed Fourth Ward Alderwoman Tammy Smith called Alton Police Chief Jason "Jake" Simmons and requested a special form of community outreach between the police and the community.

Over the past three years, Simmons's administration has seen a special focus on community policing, which culminated in a community policing study championed by

former St. Louis Police Chief Daniel Isom through the University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL). Besides that study, the department has also done plenty of other outreach such as "Pizza with the Police" and "Shop with a Cop." Last Saturday's Ballin' with the Cops, however, takes that community spirit and gives it a fun competitive edge.

"We had about 60 kids come from all over the city," Simmons said. "We also had about 10 officers, a couple jailers and some Alton Police Explorers. "

The Explorer Program is affiliated with the Boy Scouts of America, and are a kind of cadet program for the department with people between 14-20 who work with the police department to learn about the job of the police.

Smith also attended Ballin' with the Cops, Simmons said. He said it was the third such outing Smith had helped create with the department.

As far as the community outreach aspect of the program, Simmons said he was more than pleased with the progress. He said not only did as many as 60 children between 5-17 get to know and play with the police department, but added their parents did as well. He said that important addition is essential to community policing.

The police and children participated in basketball games as well as free-throw and three-point contests.

"Some of us old guys were feeling it the next day, that's for sure," Simmons said.

