

Rebound! Rims returning to James Killion Park at Salu

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Rims will be returned to James H. Killion Park at Salu by Monday, August 14, 2017, as per a mayoral agreement between community leaders.

Previous to Wednesday night's city council meeting, Alton Mayor Brant Walker delivered a statement to Riverbender.com, which stated the following:

Whereas, effective August 4, 2017, Mayor Brant Walker ordered the city workers to remove the basketball rims at Killion Park because the city crews have been overworked picking up litter and trash in the park, caused primarily by people using the park and basketball courts; and

Whereas, neighbors have contacted city officials expressing dismay about the litter and trash in the park and at least one neighbor has repeatedly approached the young people playing in the park asking them to stop littering when there are multiple trash cans available; and

Whereas, the office of Mayor Brant Walker has reached out to various community leaders and community organizations for suggestions and assistance in dealing with the irresponsible actions of a limited number of persons utilizing the basketball courts at Killion Park; and

Whereas certain community leaders and community organizations have volunteered to assist the City of Alton in trying to remedy the above issues.

NOW THEREFORE IT IS AGREED BY AND BETWEEN THE CITY OF ALTON, THE ALTON CHAPTER OF THE NAACP, THE 100 BLACK MEN OF THE CITY OF ALTON AND THE COALITION OF CONCERNED CITIZENS AS FOLLOWS:
(Emphasis: city's)

Volunteers organized by the Alton Branch of the NAACP, the 100 Black Men, the Coalition of Concerned Citizens along with other community organizations will begin immediately to offer volunteer patrols for Killion Park to pick up litter and trash deposited in Killion Park and further to attempt to make contact with those irresponsible young people depositing litter and trash persuading them to utilize the many trash receptacles available for the proper deposit of litter and trash.

In appreciation and consideration of the voluntary assistance provided by the ALton branch of the NAACP and the 100 Black Men of Alton, Illinois, Mayor Brant Walker will order the basketball rims to be reinstalled on the backboards at Killion Park no later than Monday, August 14, 2017.

The statement was signed by the mayor as well as leaders of the Alton branch of the NAACP, the 100 Black Men and the Coalition of Concerned Citizens.

Public Comments

After reading that statement, and taking care of normal city business, the Alton City Council opened the floor for public comments on the issue, allowing each person as

long as five minutes to speak on the issue. Seven of the eight people who applied for public comment spoke regarding the rims at James Killion Park at Salu.

Abe Lee Barham, who worked tirelessly to get the park named for his mentor, James H. Killion, said, while he appreciated the return of the rims, he believes the statement still shows a clear racial division regarding the park. Barham believes the rims being taken were not a racial issue, despite the park being historically considered in a black area. Killion himself stood for integration and inclusion during a time period of segregation and skin color-based exclusion.

"Why were only the NAACP and the 100 Black Men called?" Barham challenged after reading the statement prior to the meeting. "Would those groups be called in for Gordon Moore? Why wasn't PRIDE, Inc. called into the matter at Killion?"

Barham also addressed the council publicly, calling for accountability for those who want to trash the park with littering.

"We need to take accountability for the park," he said. "If they can shoot hoops, they can hit a can. Where was all of this a couple weeks ago - a month ago? Killion was my mentor. Every time something goes wrong up there, it bothers me."

He also challenged Mayor Walker to get to know the people and kids who play at the park. He invited Walker to the Back to School Stay in School event this Saturday, during which as many as 700 students from across the city will be able to receive free backpacks and school supplies. Walker said he attends the event every year, and this year will be no different.

Walker also assured the heavy equipment currently at James H. Killion Park at Salu would be removed by this weekend. The equipment was stationed at the park to replace the sidewalks - a job Walker said would be done before Saturday's large event at the park.

Former Alton mayoral candidate and self-described community activist Joshua Young also addressed the council. Young spoke of a meeting held Wednesday afternoon between the city administration and several community leaders fondly, adding he saw Mayor Walker "humbled."

"I sat in and witnessed an excellent negotiation," Young said. "Alderwoman Tammy Smith, our Police Chief Jake Simmons and Brant Walker all came together with the community. The elder leadership showed me something significant. The minority's voice could be magnified. White and black came together for the park. We can, as a community, start working for the improvement of the park. It is a great park."

In the future, Young hoped families could have bricks with their family names in the park. He hoped success stories who made careers of basketball or any other notable career could be immortalized in the park as well. Young spoke of a future park made better by people working in tandem for it from across the community. His speech was met with a round of applause from several people assembled in support of the rims returning to the park.

Barbershop owner Carlton Cannon also spoke regarding the rims, saying many of his customers were concerned the city could take such an approach in the future. He said the way the issue was handled made many people feel as if they did not have a first line of defense regarding city issues. He also questioned why a basketball court was not a mainstay in other city parks, such as Haskell and Gordon Moore.

"We want to help," Cannon said of the community surrounding the park. "Go talk to people in the neighborhood. It's not about the court, it's about the rims, and this is a good place to start making amends."

Nate Keener, a precinct committeeman in the Milton area as well as a leader in the Confluence Progressives political group also spoke on behalf of the courts, saying the city's initial approach of taking the rims only harms the already-eroding trust between people and government.

"I take my daughter up there," Keener said. "I clean up broken liquor bottles, broken beer bottles and cigarillo wrappers. It says we have more than a littering problem. It says we have a drug and homelessness problem as well. The litter problem is all around Alton."

Keener is one of the organizers of several city-wide litter cleanups, which target heavily trashed areas throughout Alton. He offered to add James H. Killion Park to the list of places they clean.

"This spoke to the idea of trust and credibility gap at the way we view government at all levels," he said. "We're quick to assign blame and cast a heavy hand. Problem solving works best from the bottom up. Moves like this continue the erosion of trust people feel. It makes people feel like they are the problem, even if they have done nothing wrong. It makes us feel incapable of solving problems without the Sword of Damocles over our heads."