

Game on: Basketball hoops return to Killion Park

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - Basketball hoops were returned to the backboards at James Killion Park at Salu Monday morning.

The hoops were taken last Monday, Aug. 7, following a drive-by of the park by Alton Mayor Brant Walker. Walker sighted what was described as an excessive amount of litter and called Alton Parks and Recreation Director Michael Haynes, who told Walker park workers have to spend as long as two hours cleaning trash at that park before

mowing it. Because of the litter problem, its threat to public safety, and upcoming construction to replace the sidewalk at James Killion Park, Walker said he decided to remove the hoops from the backboards.

"It was never meant to be a permanent thing," Walker said at the Wednesday, Aug. 9, Alton City Council meeting. "It was only going to be temporary until the litter problem was fixed."

The hoops were returned following an agreement reached between the city, the Alton branch of the NAACP, the 100 Black Men of Alton and the Coalition of Concerned Citizens. All three organizations are historically black, and Abe Lee Barham, who fought for the former Salu Park to be named for his mentor, James Killion, criticized the agreement for that.

"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 did agree, however, excessive littering was an issue at the park.

Community activist and former Alton mayoral candidate Joshua Young said he is working toward the creation of a committee for James Killion Park at Salu in much the same fashion Gordon Moore has a commission and Friends of Haskell Park raise money and awareness for that park. He said the committee will be diverse, inclusive and will help create a community stake in the park's well-being.

"I thank the multitude of peoples, from different social backgrounds; ho came together and said, 'enough is enough,'" Young said in a Facebook message. "Those who press for not just the rims to return, but the initiation of the first James Killion Restoration Committee. This committee will work towards the complete restoration and cultural heritage preservation of the park."

Walker agreed with Young's idea to have the surrounding community help shape the future of the park. He cited work being done to Riverview, Rock Spring, Gordon Moore and Haskell Park by concerned citizens as proof such a group could work to create a positive environment in what Walker described as "a great and fantastic park."

The park was named in honor of James Killion, who was the first person of color hired at Laclede Steel, where he worked to create a union. He was also the first person of color to join the U.S. Army from Alton during World War II. During the war, he was a part of the D-Day invasion. He was also a community leader, serving on many boards, and was a Boy Scout leader and a junior high baseball umpire. He worked to get

Oakwood annexed into the City of Alton, so the impoverished mostly black population could benefit from city services.