

Community policing in action: Rookie cops assist in city cleanups

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
August 23 2017 10:23 AM



ALTON - Following a court order, a home near the corner of Eighth Street and Alton required cleaning, and the rookies of the Alton Police Department accepted the challenge.

Rookie police officers joined with PAC-UP crews completing community service Wednesday morning to assist a person Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons and Alton Mayor Brant Walker described as an elderly hoarder maintain control of her yard. Simmons said the cleanup process began before 8 a.m. Wednesday, and by 9 a.m., they had hauled as many as four trailers worth of junk from the home. Simmons said the cleanup both assisted the woman and taught the incoming officers - who are only a few months out of the academy - about the true mission of police work.

"She's O.K. with it," Simmons said of the homeowner. "The neighbors are happy. I hope it's a lesson to the newer officers. Police work is about working in the community and making it better. This is a work in progress."

Five rookie officers assisted in the cleanup. Simmons said their efforts were a great display of Alton's community policing model. Following the completion of that home's cleanup, Simmons said the officers were going to travel around the city and clean television sets and furniture left on the side of the streets.

"There's a lot more to being a police officer than writing tickets," he said. "I'm going to show them the main purpose of their jobs is making Alton a better place to live."



Simmons was joined by Alton Police training officer Pete Vambaketes.

Mayor Walker described the situation as "sad in two ways."

"It's equally sad an individual was living in these bad and unhealthy conditions, and that an otherwise great neighborhood was exposed to these conditions," he said.

As far as the police participation, Walker was pleased with the good work they were doing. He lamented at the negative aspects of police work often displayed on the mainstream media and said the Alton Police Department was constantly working to make Alton a better place.

Second Ward Alderwoman Carolyn MacAfee said the home in her ward has been an issue for at least four years. She said an adjacent neighbor built a large white privacy fence between their home and the woman's, adding junk was as high as the top of that fence before the cleaning process.

The homeowner was not in the residence at the time of the cleanup, but MacAfee and Simmons said the woman was notified of it well in advance and was given her time in court to challenge the city's ruling.

