

Alton Police investigating racist literature hoax being passed around Facebook

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - A post circulating throughout Facebook claims to show the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) advertising a rally at Fast Eddies Fried Chicken, located at 701 Central Ave. on Friday, Sept. 22, 2017.

The post, which has nearly 1,500 views and reactions, Alton Police Chief Jason Simmons said, seems to be a hoax at this time. Simmons said it is the product of image-editing derived from an actual piece of KKK literature being passed around South Carolina earlier this year. Simmons said he was alerted to it by Democratic Fourth Ward Precinct Committeeman Joshua Young, and both men believe it now to be a hoax sent to receive reactions on social media.

"Seems as if it originated in South Carolina, and it appears to have been changed to Alton, Illinois," Simmons said. "To me, it seems as if someone had a little too much time on their hands, got a little creative and changed it while sitting in their mom's basement."

Young shared Simmons's suspicion, but added such a message is concerning to be seen going through social media, especially given the location of the alleged meeting is set to take place in his precinct.

"I take it as a school bomb threat," Young said. "It's probably a hoax, but the number on it is real. It hits way too close to home and real life."

Cathy Sholar, owner of Fast Eddie's Fried Chicken called Simmons earlier Thursday afternoon in tears, the chief said. Simmons assured Sholar had nothing to do with the racist literature being passed around Facebook.

"This is just ridiculous," he said. "Our community is better than that."

If such a rally does take place, Young said he believes the KKK has their right to free speech, but said he would also take measures to ensure a much larger counter-protest if one were to happen. Young said he contacted the city to inquire about possible rallies being hosted in the future and was told there were none at this time. He added he felt pretty good about the chief's reaction.

"If they show up, they do have rights of protest, but best believe I have counter protest measures in place," Young said. "The chief makes me feel comfortable that he has eyes on it."

A similar pamphlet, also containing a blue raspberry Dum-Dum and a Cow Tail, is also being passed around social media for Granite City residents. Young and Simmons believe that one to be a hoax as well. Another such incident occurred on Sept. 14 in historically-black neighborhoods around Champaign, Illinois, Simmons said.

While the men believe the posting to be a hoax, each are concerned with its message. Both Young and Simmons called the number listed, and it did take them to the KKK's

hotline. A call placed to it by Riverbender.com revealed it to be as well. While no one answered, a recorded message played deriding Jewish people and calling for their destruction, condemning "race-mixing" and homosexuality and a call for all white people to "take back their country."

Simmons said he left a message following the recording and has yet to have his call returned. He said he is worried someone is using the flyer to possibly promote violence in the community. The chief said Sholar has received several threatening phone calls throughout Thursday after he was alerted to the situation after 7 a.m.

"I'm more concerned about the violent and racist comments," he said. "If I find out people are trying to incite violence, there will be consequences."

Ultimately, Young said he was unnerved by the packet itself. He said a similar packet for his #WeAreNow progressive campaign was in the works - albeit with a drastically different message.

"All of these things are accurate to a recruitment package," Young said. "There are symbols of the movement, numbers, calls to action and even a meeting place and some candy. It's too close to home to just simply cast off as a hoax."

Police are still investigating the origin of the image.