

Colorful cans hope to discourage litter at James Killion Park

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON – After a controversial move of taking basketball rims due to what the City of Alton described as “excessive littering” in 2017, a new set of eyes turned toward James Killion Park.

Since the ensuing debates following that move by the city, which many viewed as heavy-handed during follow-up demonstrations by citizens at that park, the James Killion Beautification Enhancement Committee was founded with help from the city itself, specifically Alton Mayor Brant Walker, who made the call to take down the rims in the first place, and Fourth Ward Alderwoman Tammy Smith. Smith helps direct the committee alongside prominent Altonians such as Steve Thomas, Abe Lee Barham, Sheila Goins and Joyce Elliott.

This newly-formed committee has worked with private companies, local non-profit groups and the city itself to bring not only more eyes to the park, but more people to come enjoy it. Thomas said the group has already worked to improve lighting, and added a new pavilion for families to enjoy.

The most recent work was done specifically to respond to the “excessive litter” cited by the city during the rims incident. Thomas said students from Alton High School, Alton Middle School, North Elementary School and East Elementary School have joined with the Alton Boys and Girls Club to replace the typical green trash cans in the park with something new.

“We wanted to change the trash cans and give them a more attractive look,” Thomas said. “We thought people would be more happy to toss their trash there than in the ground, which they previously had done.”

These 18 new trash receptacles will be revealed to the public on Saturday, April 28, during a reveal and dedication ceremony from 1-2 p.m. at the park.

Joshua Young, who ran as a write-in candidate for the 2017 Alton Mayoral Race, was active on social media during the rims dispute, and attempted to found a beautification committee for the park without the city having a say in its matters. Thomas said the current group is a replacement for Young's attempt.

“I'm not objecting to the children expressing their creative talents through arts; it's a wonderful way to give those children stake in the park,” Young said via Facebook Messenger. “It's amazing when opportunities are given fairly towards progression. All can feel involved.”

While pleased with the new improvements at the park, Young described the method in which the current committee was formed was a “coup” by the city to select people he described as “favorites” in a move he said was “unethical,” adding the city creating a new committee without him “totally deters inclusiveness.”

Despite the disagreement regarding the new committee, Young said he hopes the park gets the improvements he desired for it. New lighting and a pavilion were part of his desired format for the park as well.



In the future, Thomas said the committee would raise funds for PRIDE, Inc. through the sale of bricks for \$50 a piece. That program will be announced immediately following the reveal of the new creatively-designed trash cans. Those bricks will go toward the building of a new brick wall to replace an aging fence dedicated by the Alton Chapter of the 100 Black Men more than two decades ago.

“It was a good idea back then when the 100 Black Men did that, but we're an enhancement committee, so we're going to build a brick wall in its place,” Thomas said. “It will be similar to that park near Union – Hellrung.”

Thomas said Alton Public Works Director Bob Barnhart is also working with the committee to replace concrete from the southeastern side to the northwestern side of the park – a project he optimistically hopes can be completed this year.

Next year, Thomas said the committee will work with the city and community donors to address one of the biggest issues of James Killion Park, according to interviews conducted at the time of the rims being removed – its complete lack of any water facilities. Thomas said he hoped 2019 could see a fully-functioning James Killion Park.

Besides the city and PRIDE, Inc. President Monica Semnacher, Thomas said he would like to thank the students who worked on the cans as well as Dunbar Lodge #97 of Free and Accepted Masons, and Cass Sheppard from Sheppard, Mogran and Schwaab.