

Mustache March: How the Riverbend community shows appreciation for local law enforcement

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON – Wednesday was Law Enforcement Appreciation Day, as many social media accounts displayed with their showing of gratitude for police departments nationwide.

While social media is a modern form of showing support and gratitude to a large audience, several members of the community take their dedication to law enforcement to the next level by actually donating funds and raising awareness of law enforcement and the needs of the community. When asked Wednesday what ways the community shows gratitude to departments, Alton Police Public Information Officer Emily Hejna mentioned Mustache March, an event in its third year, which raises money for police departments across the area with a special focus on community relations.

Over the last three years, the committee behind the event, which takes place each year at Bluff City Grill, which sponsors the event and donates the space, has donated money to as many as 10 police departments across the area.

Funding from Mustache March has gone toward getting a grill for the Brighton Police Department, a canine officer for the Jerseyville Police Department and free gas fill-ups at the Bethalto and Alton Hit-N-Runs from their respective departments. Hit-N-Run is also a sponsor of the annual event, which was founded by Steve Schwegel. His band, the Glendale Riders, also play the events.

“It was started at a time when relations between the police department and community were rough around the country,” Mustache March Committee Member and mother of an Alton Police officer, Tina Bennett said. “We thought police officers were getting a rough go of things. It was also around the time Officer Blake Snyder was killed in the line of duty in St. Louis.”

One of the first donations from Mustache March to the Alton Police Department went toward sending four officers from the department to Washington, D.C. for participation in the honor guard in the name of Snyder, who was a Riverbend native.

“Mustache March 4 Police Departments (MM4PD) is a perfect example of what a group of amazing individuals with good hearts can accomplish,” Hejna said in a Wednesday email. “What is especially cool about their efforts is that they work together to support all local law enforcement, not just one city.

“Because of their support in 2018, the Alton Police Department was able to buy equipment for our officers we otherwise could not have afforded. Their donation purchased fitness equipment to replace some of our worn and broken equipment. The donation also provided one tourniquet to each officer at the . The use of a tourniquet can save someone's life, and now each of our officers has one to carry specifically to save their life if required.”

Bennett said helping local departments become more engaged with serving their community is a goal of the organization, because many of the (especially smaller) departments don't have the money to embark on needed community outreach.

“People want to see more police engagement with the community, and the funding isn't there for a lot of these departments,” she said. “You can't have a pizza party if there isn't money there to foot the bill.”

Money from the event also went toward educational safety videos put on social media by the Alton Police Department, produced by the Unseen Stars. It was also utilized for the department's Trunk or Treat program around Halloween.

Mustache March is slated for another event this coming March, also at Bluff City Grill.