



Hiram's Bar Owner, Incident Attendee, Chief of Police, Comment on Recent Controversy Involving Alton Mayor's Wife

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
April 10 2020 9:16 AM









ALTON - The Hiram's Bar incident story in which seven gathered together early Sunday has gone viral and has been shared all over the country and world.

Seven were cited in the situation for violating Gov. J.B. Pritzker's stay-at-home order at the back of Hiram's Bar. Shannon Walker, wife of Alton mayor Brant Walker, was present at the gathering and one of those cited. **Read the full story [here](#).**

Because many in the media viewed the story as sensational during the coronavirus saga, it became a worldwide media saga.

The owner of the bar - Hiram Lewis - spoke out today, along with Matt Coolbaugh, who was in attendance that night and Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons updated his thoughts.

Alton's Coolbaugh, 36, was one of those present at the Saturday into Sunday gathering. He was upfront, saying "We all regret what happened and take full responsibility for our actions. We were just unaware of what deemed acceptable."

Matthew Coolbaugh, Hiram Y. Lewis, Anthony C. Griffie, Shannon Walker, Deven M. Fair, Nathan D. Stoeckel, and Jennifer A. Helgren were all present at the incident and issued citations.

Coolbaugh said he believes the story went viral simply because the Alton mayor's wife, Shannon Walker, was present. Coolbaugh said he feels sorry for Mayor Walker and his wife, for what they have had to endure because this happened, as the story broke across the country and even the globe. He said the threats to Shannon and attacks to the mayor were completely uncalled for and should never have happened.

"I don't think it was a really big story other than the mayor's wife, Shannon, being there," he said. "If it wasn't for that, I don't think the story would have blown up."

The Alton man said he also thought the Alton Police Department handled the entire situation respectfully. He said none of those present were out intentionally to break Governor Pritzker's order.

"The police were really cool about it," he said when Alton Police arrived. "There was confusion when they first got there, but when the dust settled we were on the sidewalk talking."

Coolbaugh said he and another of the group work at a bar. Both are presently out of jobs because of the statewide shutdown.

"I have been laid off and it is really tough sitting at home with no pay," he said. "We just wanted to get out of the house and we made sure there were under 10 of us who got together. Hiram and I are friends and we wanted to have a few people and hang out at his residence and play darts. We had seven total people there."

Lewis said he regrets having what he described as "six friends," over to an area at the back of the bar. He said he considers the area like his "basement," because he resides in an apartment above the back end of the bar. He said the main bar area was empty with no alcohol present and that he did not sell alcohol in the back area, but a few brought their own alcohol.

Alton Police Chief Jason Simmons said Lewis did not have a legal occupancy permit for the apartment upstairs, which he saw as a problem.

Lewis said he plans to follow protocol and once the coronavirus saga slows down, he will have the building and zoning crew inspect the apartment area. He said he has some drywall work and painting left to do upstairs.

Chief Simmons said when Alton Police entered the building, they entered not a dwelling but part of the bar.

“We heard music and we walked into the dance floor,” he said.

Lewis said he feels he let a lot of people down by hosting friends during the COVID-19 pandemic and he apologized.

Chief Simmons said Shannon Walker, Alton Mayor Brant Walker’s wife, was immediately recognized and he agreed that made the case sensational for the media.

“We had to treat Shannon Walker like anyone else,” he said. “We cited everyone there and all were released,” he said. The chief did emphasize that two of those drinking did receive alternate transportation home.

Lewis said he “screwed up” and shouldn’t have allowed again what he described as “friends,” to come to his place with Gov. Pritzker’s stay-at-home order on the books.

"I would like to apologize to the City of Alton, the mayor, the mayor's wife, the police chief and the people of Alton," Lewis added. "I sincerely apologize for causing this level of embarrassment to my community. I am the one that deserves to be embarrassed not my friends, or the other mentioned people. I never should have allowed my friends to come over during these pandemic times. Even though we were not open to the public selling food or drinks, it was still wrong and irresponsible to allow my friends to congregate at my establishment."

Lewis said before the coronavirus hit, his business in Alton was going very well.

“I have had a very good experience in Alton,” he said. “I hope we can come back. I put my life savings into this bar. The bar was not open and I was not selling alcohol. I also feel sorry for Shannon and her treatment.”

Chief Simmons agreed the situation was handled with respect by both sides. The chief said the defendants will be able to present their case in court when the time comes.

Read Shannon Walker's Statement: [*Shannon Walker Issues Statement About Hiram's Bar Incident in Alton*](#)

