



Mayor Addresses Recent Fireworks Incidents in Oakwood Estates

July 12 2010 8:39 AM

It is with sadness and regret that I am writing this letter to the citizens of Alton regarding recent activity at Oakwood Estates involving fireworks. Over the 4th of July weekend, a group of people created small fires within the Oakwood Estates development. Firefighters and police officers responded and were shot at with fireworks by onlookers.

A terrible tragedy was averted because the fires were easily controlled and our police officers, ever the professionals, quickly analyzed the situation and got everything under control before serious injuries occurred. I have nothing but praise for our police officers and firefighters who were responding to a call for life safety. What if someone would have been injured from the fire and needed first aid or serious medical help? This could have turned into a critical situation with someone seriously injured or dead. Thankfully, this did not occur thanks to the actions of the responding police officers and firefighters.

Those fires and the attacks on public safety officers with fireworks were caused by an unruly group of people with total disregard of the law and the safety of their families and neighbors. The actions of a very small segment of our community have once again reared their ugly head and have portrayed our City as a place of violence, lacking respect for the law and members of the community.

Following the incident, I spoke with the Police Chief David Hayes and Director of the Alton Housing Authority Andy Hightower. A criminal investigation is under way. Make no mistake, any party found guilty will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law and, if a guilty party is a resident of the Housing Authority, they will be evicted. Starting fires and attacking public safety personnel will not be tolerated.

As Mayor, I cannot adequately express how disappointed I am that this incident occurred. I have reached out and participated with all members of our community, implementing and expanding programs to achieve a better working relationship and sense of fairness with all residents.

I know that Mr. Hightower, the Director of the Alton Housing Authority runs those developments with a firm, but fair, hand. The Housing Authority goes to great lengths to make the accommodations in Oakwood Estates and elsewhere a place where residents and visitors feel safe. Living conditions are kept as modern as possible and there are family activities. The Alton Housing Authority tries to create an atmosphere of a neighborhood rather than a “housing project.” Crime is minimal and the residents are basically hard working people. However, some of the residents on this particular evening became part of a large crowd, including some non-residents. These people were all aware that the shooting of fireworks is against City and State law. There is no doubt that some of the fires were set intentionally to draw the police and firefighters into harms way. For the life of me, I do not understand what these people were thinking.

What sort of message does this send to prospective homeowners and businesses looking to relocate and bring jobs to our community? City leaders have been working diligently to attract new businesses, create job opportunities, and create a safe place for residents to live and raise a family. I will not let this sort of activity drag our community through the mud and I will continue to work with all civic leaders to rectify this situation, prevent reoccurrences of any sort, and take a firm stance on punishment of anyone implicated.

On a final point, I have been contacted by various news outlets, national and St. Louis based, and have not spoken on this matter because that would negatively impact our City. However, I am sharing my opinions and thoughts with our local media because this problem can only