

# THE ADVOCATE

NEWSPAPER ARCHIVES

## **Landlord blames lack of police for shooting of four at party**

Advocate - Baton Rouge, La.

Author: Sandy Davis

Date: Jun 14, 2005

Section: News

Saturday night party that ended with four people getting shot in Melrose East has angered an apartment complex owner, who said Monday that crime has risen since two community police officers were "redeployed."

"I am very clearly blaming the shootings on the removal of the police officers who were assigned to patrol Melrose East," said Howard Gylar, managing partner of B-G&G Investors LLC, which owns Cezanne Square, the complex where the shootings took place Saturday.

"Between the officers who patrolled this area during the day and some of the things we were doing, crime was decreasing in Melrose East," Gylar said. "That has all changed."

Gylar was referring to Police Chief Jeff LeDuff's decision - made shortly after LeDuff was named chief in February - to reassign two bicycle patrol officers from Melrose East to the American Bowling Congress tournament being held downtown at the River Center.

"Melrose East was the only area where there were dedicated police officers in the city," said Sgt. Don Kelly, a Police Department spokesman. "The people in Melrose are upset now because they got used to having them, but we have a whole city to protect."

Kelly said the decision to shift police officers out of Melrose East - which has been known for high crime since the mid-1980s - was reached when LeDuff and his new staff were mapping out strategy for assigning police officers.

"The decision happened not long after the new administration took over and they were realigning their priorities," Kelly said. "They felt like (Melrose East) didn't need two dedicated police officers."

LeDuff, who spoke at the Baton Rouge Press Club on Monday, said he is working on the "redeployment of uniformed patrolmen" in the city.

"You will see an effort to reorganize our uniform patrol," he said, but he was not specific on what his plans are for the 360 members of that force beyond saying that he hoped to change work shifts from 10 hours to eight-hour or 12-hour shifts.

LeDuff also said that he is willing "to try things that are unusual" in fighting crime.

"We have been told we need to be creative," he said. "And we will be."

While LeDuff said he is trying to find new ways to fight crime, Kelly said Melrose East's major crime rate has dropped in the first quarter of 2005 when compared with what it was in the first quarter of 2004.

While murders, rapes and robberies have increased slightly in the first quarter of 2005 when compared with the same time in 2004, aggravated assaults, burglaries, larcenies and auto theft have decreased.

And Gyler agrees that crime was decreasing in the area.

"We were working hard to get it reduced, and it was working," Gyler said. "That's one of the reasons we lost our two patrol officers - it looked like we didn't need them."

He said that property owners in the area had hired off-duty police to patrol the area at night and the Melrose East Community Association had been reinstated a year ago. That kept residents involved in community issues.

But Gyler said the two city police officers were at the heart of their crime prevention efforts.

"They did a lot," he said. "They were in touch with residents on a daily basis talking to them and keeping things calm."

Since the two officers were reassigned, Gyler said, "There has been a murder, a significant act of child abuse, the (Saturday shooting) and several out-of-control parties in which residents and property owners were threatened."

The Melrose East neighborhood is behind Bon Carre Town Center and generally bounded by Florida Boulevard to the south, Greenwell Springs Road to the north, North Ardenwood Drive to the west and Lobdell Avenue to the east.

Police said four people were shot at the party Saturday night in Cezanne Square, which is owned by Gyler's group of investors, after a fight erupted between residents and an unknown group of men who were visiting.

"None of the victims will provide any information," said Cpl. L'Jean McKneely, a police spokesman. "They told police they don't know anything about who shot them."

Gyler said he is thankful no one was killed in the shooting.

"We wonder how many more shootings and deaths must take place before the mayor and the police chief will return community police officers," he said.

**[Illustration]**

Photo: B.W. photo of Police Chief Jeff LeDuff talking to the Baton Rouge Press Club on Monday (By Patrick Dennis)