

'Crime, you can't have Suffolk'

By Staff Reports



By Tracy Agnew, Henry Luzzatto and Alyssa Esposito

Thousands of Suffolk residents came together Tuesday at nearly 30 locations around the city to fight back against crime.

"Tonight, we stand as one to say, 'Crime, you can't have our minds; crime, you can't have our hearts, and you're not going to keep us from enjoying life,'" Chief of Fire and Rescue Cedric Scott said at the kickoff event at the Visitor Center Pavilion. "We stand as one to say, 'Crime, you can't have Suffolk.'"

National Night Out is a fun night, with many communities holding cookouts, children's games and other activities. But it has a serious purpose.

Police Chief Thomas Bennett acknowledged the work of Ferguson's office in announcing that violent crime — murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault — in the city is down 13 percent so far this year compared to the same period last year.

"I believe we have a lot of the right people tucked away where they can't commit crime," Bennett said, noting the prosecutions effected by Ferguson's office played a big role in that.

Many communities hold combined events, as all of the Suffolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority communities did at the authority's headquarters. Hundreds came out to the East Pinner Street location to enjoy a bounce house, free food, snow-cones, face painting and entertainment, despite the heat.

One of the biggest combined events is held at Sentara Obici Hospital, where several neighborhoods surrounding the hospital have joined together to make a bigger and better event.

"We're really proud of everyone coming out," said Sheila Patterson, the leader of the group that organized the gathering. Activities there included a rock wall, bounce castle, face painting, a puppet show, games and community resources.

Obici and Chuckatuck were the two finale points for the seven motorcades of city and law enforcement officials who had visited every event in town.

"We try to bring the community together with fellowship," said Opal McCleod, president of the Chuckatuck Civic League. "It's a good opportunity to bring everyone together and just enjoy each other's company."

In Huntersville, the community was reviving its National Night Out event after taking a hiatus last year.



Fire and Rescue Chief Cedric Scott gave the most moving speech of the night at the National Night Out kickoff at the Suffolk Visitor Center Pavilion when he declared, "Crime, you can't have Suffolk."

“It’s bringing together the whole Huntersville community,” said Gerri Norman, president of the Huntersville Civic League.

“National Night Out is an event that brings the whole city together and shows that our communities are strong and that crime won’t be tolerated,” Maj. Stephanie Burch of the Suffolk Police Department said in Huntersville.

Nearby in Burbage Grant, folks came out for the fun as well as for the more serious aspect — fighting crime.

“My kids love it, and it’s a great way to meet new neighbors,” said Donna Purkey.

Tom Bennett, the Neighborhood Watch leader, and his wife Jana said it was the 10th year participating in the event.

“It’s good for the community,” Bennett said. “It’s important to show that the community is against crime and aware of what’s happening in the community.”

Sheriff Raleigh Isaacs expressed his hope at the kickoff that the good work of National Night Out will continue all year long.

“This event will build a stronger and safer city, and hopefully it will extend beyond this one night,” he said.

Suffolk hopes to bring home yet another first-place trophy from the National Association of Town Watch, which sponsors the national event.

“This night continues to define what our city is made of when it comes to community involvement,” interim city manager Patrick Roberts said at the kickoff event.

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Soquia Blizzard, Simone Green and Jaceyon Ensley enjoy food and beverages during the National Night Out celebration at the Suffolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority headquarters on Tuesday.

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