

HOMEWOOD

Neighborhood bands together after shootings

Area near James Hart Middle School scene of two incidents

By Olivia Stevens
Daily Southtown

Residents who live near and on Olive Road in Homewood say they enjoy a quiet life ideal for raising a family. The area, only a few blocks away from James Hart Middle School, the Homewood-Flossmoor sports complex and public pool, and the Izaak Walton nature preserve, is tree lined and quaint. “It’s pretty idyllic,” Eric Crump said Friday, pointing out an ash tree across the street from his home on the 1300 Block of Olive Road that was turned into a Little Free Library after the tree died a decade ago.

“I see people stop there, grandmas with little kids, looking through the books pretty regularly,” Crump said. But the peaceful, wholesome self-image of the neighborhood contrasts with two shootings within a several block radius since April. A bullet hole remains visible on the front siding of Crump’s house from the night of July 21. Crump and neighbor Tracie Moxley, whose home farther west was hit with gunfire April 20, several days after Easter, were among those to form a neighborhood watch group after the July 21 shooting. The goal of the group, named Izaak Walton South Neighbors, is not for neighbors to take matters into their own hands, but to partner with police and promote observation and communication among

residents, Crump said. “It’s really a great catalyst for helping our neighbors come together and be more of a neighborhood than we ever have been,” Crump said. “When an incident does happen, everybody rallies around. They don’t just retreat into their house and draw the blinds,” he said. Moxley said she believes the legacy of the shootings, which are usually unheard of in their area, will be greater community connections. The first meeting of the Izaak Walton South Neighbors on Monday drew about 50 people, with the next scheduled for Aug. 11. As community members band together, Homewood police say they are investigating the shootings and their causes, providing

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Eric Crump and Tracie Moxley stand in front of Crump’s home Friday. Crump and Moxley’s houses were hit by bullets in separate shootings in April and July. OLIVIA STEVENS/DAILY SOUTHTOWN

Backyard garden yields bounty of produce, one special gift



Donna Vickroy

Every year I am completely amazed that my little backyard garden experiment actually works. While most of my growing seasons are more error than trial, this year’s bounty has turned my thumbs green with gratitude. I have spent the better part of July harvesting cherry tomatoes, plum tomatoes, San Marzano tomatoes, onions, green beans, cucumbers, zucchini, bell and poblano and jalapeno peppers, and a huge crop of pride. The life cycle of a vegetable garden is charged with emotion. In spring, it’s all hope and possibilities. There is soil to amend, seeds to start and layouts to design. Summer brings the mania of constant care as we head out early to water and devote weekends to weeding. In fall, we bask in the bounty and embrace pariah season as we push two zucchinis with every handful of grape tomatoes. I learned the basics of gardening from my father, who for years tended to a tiny plot behind our garage. He grew the usual fare but tomatoes were his favorite and his pride and joy. When my husband and I bought our first house, my dad helped stake out a plot, turn over the soil and plant our first official garden. Though he was more of a practical guy than philosophical theorist, every now and then, he’d share a reverent kind of wisdom. “If you want the earth to take care of you,” he’d say, “you have to take care of the earth.” The land, he said, is a reflection of how we treat it.

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It’s promising to be a bumper crop this year for columnist Donna Vickroy after she learned why previous year’s mistakes had taken a toll on the land. DONNA VICKROY



Jones Center Director Juana Morales, from left, Franciscan Health Community Health Improvement Coordinator Justin Davis, and three participants in the Walk With a Doc program gather Friday at the Jones Community Center in Chicago Heights before engaging in stretching and walking activities. PAUL EISENBERG/DAILY SOUTHTOWN

CHICAGO HEIGHTS WALK WITH A DOC

Program offers expert health tips, along with a good stroll

By Melinda Moore

Area residents who want to learn more about improving their health and get some exercise at the same time have a new way to do just that thanks to Walk With a Doc, which meets at 11 a.m. Fridays through Aug. 22 at the Jones Memorial Community Center, 220 E. 15th St. in Chicago Heights. The national program, which began in Ohio in 2005, features a short presentation by a health care provider followed by stretching and a walk. Justin Davis, Franciscan Health community health improvement coordinator, has lined up speakers for the free program such as a diabetes specialist, a health screening coordinator and someone who will address issues related to mental health. “I’m going to have someone give a presentation for about 15 minutes, and then afterward I’ll lead the walk,” he said. “The walk may not be an hour – it might only be 30 minutes – because I don’t know if everybody can walk far distances. ... We have a part I’ve mapped out for everybody on how the walk will go once we get there.” If weather allows, the walk will take place on the sidewalk by the community center. “If not, we can use a gymnasium or other rooms

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— Justin Davis, Franciscan Health community health improvement coordinator

where we can walk,” he said. Those who join the walk should plan to wear comfortable clothing such as shorts, T-shirts or sweats. “We don’t want you wearing anything professional,” Davis joked. Attendees will be sitting during the presentation. “You’ll not be standing the majority of the time,” he said. The center offers plenty of parking. “The place is big and it’s been around over 100 years,” Davis shared, adding that he’ll be near the front entrance with the center’s manager so people will know where to go. Davis is enthusiastic about Walk With a Doc, which Franciscan Health in Lake County, Indiana, formally joined back in 2017. “This program happens (already) in Indiana. It’s my first time. I’m excited to see how it goes and I’ll learn with everyone else,” he said.

“We wanted to try it here, wanted to expand.” The community’s response thus far has been lighter than Davis hoped. Ten people attended the first presentation July 18 by dietitian Tara Allen, a diabetes specialist, but only one person joined the walk that day. “I would say the walk did not meet my expectations. I thought more people would be present,” he said. The second event also was lightly attended. “One of my main goals is seeing the community turn out for the event. I also want them to learn something and engage with the physician and whoever the presenter may be,” Davis shared. “I want them to take something home, invite their families and friends, so it goes farther than just this.” He added that he’ll know it’s starting to succeed because the

number of participants will increase even as others continue to attend. “I want it to be the same people showing up. If it’s new people showing up, I’m cool with that, but if it’s different people every week, I don’t want that,” Davis explained. “That means they don’t see the need for this program. So if it’s new people coming, they probably heard about it, but if it’s only one person, I won’t think that’s very successful.” He expects some people may come for the presentation while others will be interested in the walk. “I think it will be more social because people know each other and they’ll get to talking. Maybe they haven’t seen each other for a while, so it will be like a social thing too.” Adding the Walk With a Doc program to the community center was a natural fit, said Juana Morales, its interim executive director. “The community center has been networking with Franciscan systems for many years. They do workshops like today we have Healthy Choices with the children, and they sponsor a meal, lunch with Chick-fil-A for 120 people,” she said. “They sponsor back to school festival book bags. They do many things for us.”

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