

After Violent Night, Calls for Nightclub to be Shut Down

Christian Schaffer, WMAR ABCNews.com, October 14, 2008

Three people were injured in a fight outside the Belvedere Hotel building early Saturday morning. There is anger in a Baltimore neighborhood after violence outside a city landmark. Early Saturday morning, two people were shot and a third was stabbed outside the Belvedere Hotel building in Mount Vernon.

Police say it started with a fight at a nightclub in the building's basement, and now there are calls to shut down the club.

The Belvedere Hotel opened in 1903, on East Chase Street in Mount Vernon. Over the years it hosted movie stars like Clark Gable, and U.S. presidents including Teddy Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. 'I love the building and I love the neighborhood,' said resident Barbara Gilbert.

Since 1991, it's been a condo building. With a catering company, ball rooms, and bars on the top floor and the ground floor. Deep in the basement there's a club called the 'Suite Ultralounge and Nightclub,' which has been open for about a year.

Early Saturday morning, police say a fight from the club spilled out onto the street. Upstairs, residents heard what happened. 'There were six shots in rapid succession,' Barbara Gilbert said. In the end, two people were shot -- a third, stabbed.

The Suite Ultralounge is a 'bottle club' which means patrons bring their own liquor. It's not regulated like a traditional bar or restaurant. City Councilman William Cole, whose 11th district includes Mount Vernon, spent much of his day on Monday trying to figure out exactly who is responsible for overseeing what goes on there. 'I've seen enough to know that something's got to change there; it's a residential building, by and large. It's a condo building and we need to do something to help the people that are living there,' he said.

Reached by phone, club owner Louis Wood told ABC-2 news that patrons are checked for weapons and other prohibited items. He believes the violence started outside the club, and outside The Belvedere. Residents are not convinced. 'We have a lot great operations in the building and it's really hard for us to have something go on that we can't control,' Gilbert said.

The three victims are expected to recover. Police say they have no suspects.

Wood says the Suite Ultralounge will be open later this week. A statement from Wood is taped to the door of the club. It reads, 'We are deeply saddened and outraged over (the) incident and we absolutely will not tolerate or allow the actions of sole individuals or groups to disrupt and/or pose a threat to the safety and welfare of the business and residential communities with acts of nuisance, violence or any type of criminal activity.'

'We are committed in our continuous efforts along with all city agencies and community associations in maintaining a clean and safe environment for our patrons and the community.'

Councilman Cole says he should know by Tuesday whether city or state laws would have to be changed to regulate 'bottle clubs' like the Suite Ultralounge.