

Rawlings-Blake, Bealefeld and citizens patrol Fed Hill bar scene

Justin Fenton, *Baltimore Sun*, January 23, 2010

A group of about 30 police officers, elected officials and citizens crowded around the entrance to Arabian Nights, a hookah bar on Light Street in Federal Hill, at about 1 a.m. as Police Commissioner Frederick H. Bealefeld III asked the owners what they were doing to help the community.

"Here's how I feel," Bealefeld said. "I want you to be successful, I want you to make a million dollars. We also feel you have to be a good neighbor, too."

Bealefeld was handing them a business card to set up a meeting, and one of the members of the crowd spoke up.

"If it's true what I heard [about your business], I don't want you to be successful," she said. "I want you to close."

As she walked away, one of the men asked the other: "Was that the new mayor???"

Stephanie Rawlings-Blake joined the group at 12:30 a.m. to walk through the Federal Hill bar scene, where police have been experimenting with new patrol strategies to counteract the hordes of drunken barhoppers who flood the streets at last call. They get in fights, they yell, they dent cars or urinate on houses. Girls in incredibly short skirts and guys fumbling around for cigarettes looked puzzledly on as our group walked through the area.

Arabian Nights has some unique problems, police and residents say. There was a stabbing there one night during a fight, and the owners locked police out another time as they responding to break up a fight.

The area was one of several affected when Police Commissioner Frederick H. Bealefeld III ordered police to stop moonlighting as bouncers or private security at bars. He feared that the officers were too beholden to whichever business was paying the bills that night, and now businesses pay into a pool to have extra officers in their general vicinity. Police have also set up roadblocks to on Cross Street and Charles Street to try to handle the flow of traffic.

Residents and businesses alike say it has largely been a success. But some residents, like 41-year-old Bill Romani, also say the new set up has had unintended consequences. "What we're seeing is that instead of trickling out [from the Cross Street Market area], they're coming out in larger groups," Romani said.

Larger groups that make more noise, and an effort to quell violence and debauchery in a tight area has now led to quality of life complaints in a wider area. Bealefeld acknowledged the problems, and said he's not sure what the solution is. But he firmly believes that the system that is in place should be a model for other nightlife districts in the city, he told Rawlings-Blake and City Councilman Bill Cole, who also participated in the walk.

It was the first public appearance together for Rawlings-Blake and Bealefeld. I've now been on two Community on Patrol walks with Rawlings-Blake - the other in the Midtown-Belvedere nightlife district - and while she's friendly and approachable, from what I've seen she doesn't engaged constituents much unless they approach her. Jack Baker, the well-known and longtime community leader who organized the walk, didn't realize she was coming until her black SUV pulled up.

But this time, she seemed more at ease, and there were plenty of citizens coming her way (some of them a bit tipsy, due to the surroundings), eager for a chance to greet the new mayor. Many bargoers yelled her name or jogged alongside to shake her hand. She addressed the patrol group before and after the walk, and her comments to the Arabian Nights ownership showed a flash of festiness.