

Double shooting downtown 'isolated and targeted'

Justin Fenton, *The Baltimore Sun*, December 1, 2010

Police are calling a double shooting in downtown Baltimore that left a man in critical condition -- the third violent incident in the heart of the city since Saturday -- an "isolated and targeted" attack and stressed that the area remains safe.

Anthony Guglielmi, the department's chief spokesman, said the shooting broke out at 2 a.m. Tuesday as officers were trying to control a crowd leaving The Block, the city's hub of strip clubs on East Baltimore Street near City Hall and police headquarters.

Two men -- 20-year-old twins -- were in custody, and police said both the suspects and male victim had criminal drug histories. A woman was also shot in the foot.

"The police response has been what it should be -- officers were in the area. They made swift arrests and took these guys into custody," Guglielmi said. "What really remains the problem is these illegal guns. The mayor and police commissioner are trying to change the culture that it's not acceptable to walk around with an illegal gun. We're going to need some help."

The shooting comes days after a city police officer was shot and wounded as he confronted an armed man in the area of North Calvert and East Baltimore streets, a short distance from Tuesday's shooting. Three officers returned fire, sending bullets flying up Calvert Street and injuring the suspect.

Later Saturday, a man was reported stabbed at Light Street and Lombard Street, also in the downtown area. But police said the incidents were not cause for alarm or new deployments.

"Downtown is very safe," Guglielmi said Tuesday. "This is an isolated, targeted incident. The suspect and [male] victim had some issue with each other, and we're trying to find out what that is."

But the shooting incidents had the potential to injure others, with both occurring as bars and clubs were letting out, in an area where police have set up traffic controls to manage the exodus of patrons at last call.

Two others were killed earlier this year in separate incidents downtown -- a 26-year-old Marine shot at a Baltimore Street hookah bar, and a security guard at the Bank of America building who was breaking up an argument on Light Street.

J. Kirby Fowler Jr., president of the Downtown Partnership, called the shootings troubling and said residents and businesses that have moved into the area in droves in recent years "deserve a peaceful environment during the day as well as the night."

He said there have been "very few incidences of violence this year" in the downtown area, and those that have occurred were primarily late at night and are connected to The Block, whose businesses he said need to contribute money for overtime police coverage.

"Last year, the partnership persuaded four clubs to pay for overtime police coverage, and, as a result, the amount of violent crime on The Block has fallen," he said. "More clubs must do the same."

Police said the female victim in Tuesday's shooting, who worked as a dancer at a strip club, was leaving with a man when the shooters approached and opened fire. Officers in the area heard four or five gunshots and found the victims in the first block of Commerce Street.

The man was shot in the upper chest area and taken to Maryland Shock Trauma Center, where he was listed in "very critical" condition as of late Tuesday afternoon, Guglielmi said. The woman was found inside a vehicle, suffering from a gunshot wound to the left foot.

After receiving a description of the suspects' vehicle, plainclothes officers made a traffic stop on Martin Luther King Boulevard and took the two men into custody. A handgun was recovered and was being processed for evidence, though police said it "appeared to have just been fired."

The men were not identified, pending formal charges.

Guglielmi said the suspects had drug histories and no violent crimes in their background, unlike the man accused of shooting Officer Todd Strohman on Saturday, who had been released from prison in May after serving time for handgun and armed-robbery convictions.

But Guglielmi said both incidents highlighted the need to send a tougher message to those who carry illegal guns around the city.

"If the criminal justice system does its job, these gun toting criminals will not be wandering our streets in the middle of the night," said City Councilman William H. Cole IV, who represents the downtown area.