

## **Fourth of July incidents mar Inner Harbor's image**

By Jean Marbella, *The Baltimore Sun*, July 05, 2011

To a city that struggles to shake off its crime-ridden image, the incident seems like the last straw: On one of the most festive days of the year, in one of the safest places in town, amid a veritable battalion of police, a bullet appears to have fallen from the sky to strike a 4-year-old boy.

"I don't even know how you explain that to your kid: You can be walking down a street and a stray bullet hits you," said William H. Cole IV, the Baltimore city councilman whose district includes the Inner Harbor, where Monday's Fourth of July fireworks display was followed by the still-unexplained shooting of the boy and, separately, the fatal stabbing of a 26-year-old man.

"The whole thing is just mind-boggling," Cole said of the marred holiday. "How do you stop that?"

City leaders sought Tuesday to cope with the fallout from the incidents, and with the perception that even visitors celebrating a national holiday at Baltimore's tourist playground can't be shielded from the violence that troubles other parts of town. And they worked to minimize the long-term impact on tourism.

With another major event, the Baltimore Grand Prix auto race, set for Labor Day weekend, police and downtown officials pointedly noted that for the vast majority of those who visit or live near the harbor, it remains safe.

"Downtown is the fastest-growing neighborhood in the city. People would not be moving in if downtown was unsafe," said Kirby Fowler, president of the Downtown Partnership. "It's incredibly difficult to stop everything from happening when you have tens of thousands of people."

Many agreed that the two incidents — alarming because they occurred despite the presence of some 600 police officers — were largely isolated events.

The boy appeared to have been struck accidentally, perhaps by a bullet fired into the air by a holiday celebrant who may not have even been at the harbor. And the stabbing, of a visitor from Alabama, resulted from a shoving match among a group of men outside the McCormick & Schmick's restaurant on Pier 6.

Still, the incidents should serve notice to those who believe crime can be contained to the so-called bad parts of town, said Ed Burns, the former city police officer who, with David Simon, wrote and produced such Baltimore-defining works as "The Corner" and "The Wire."

What goes on in these neighborhoods, it's basically hell on earth," said Burns, who now lives in West Virginia. "We're very happy if it's confined to these neighborhoods because these people aren't us. But we can't expect it to stay in the neighborhoods."

Burns said cities have long turned their backs on problems such as drug addiction, school dropouts and bad housing, and now are seeing the result of that neglect.

"I'm all for people going to the harbor and having a good time. But I think people should pay more attention to their society," he said. "Consider the harbor [like] a gated community, like where the rich go to hide behind gates. When you put 600 police there, these people are relatively safe. That's a good thing. But to think that we don't pay attention to those people who aren't safe, that's another thing. It's us living in two separate worlds."

On Tuesday afternoon, the previous night's violence remained fresh in the minds of visitors to the harbor.

Christina Nash, 37, grew up in Baltimore and, after spending the past 14 years in Ohio, recently returned to the area. She now lives in Dundalk and though she was shocked to hear about the previous night's violence, she was enjoying the view of the water from a bench between the National Aquarium and the World Trade Center.

Baltimore is, "known for being ... a little rougher," she said, recalling that the most serious crime in her Ohio town was kids egging someone's house as a prank. "It can be scary."

While Baltimore geared up for the Grand Prix race, which promoters hope will bring as many as 100,000 people downtown, officials appealed to the community to help them solve the Fourth of July crimes as well as prevent future ones.

If you are with people who get into a shoving match such as the one that led to the stabbing, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake said Tuesday, separate them before it escalates.

Cole said he believes the Grand Prix can be handled in the same way as any large downtown event — whether it's the African American Festival or a Ravens or Orioles game — and noted that they generally take place without serious criminal incident. Because the Grand Prix is a ticketed event, access to the area will be more limited than the fireworks display.

Still, it remains to be seen whether Monday night's violence will affect Grand Prix ticket sales.

"You always worry about something like this having a chilling effect," Cole said.

Cole said he doesn't view the harbor differently after Monday's incidents.

"I don't ever feel unsafe there. I walk with my kids there. I ride my bike there at night since I like to see what's going on there. I never feel unsafe there," he said. "My kids will still play in the fountain, I'll still go down and eat there. It's not going to change my behavior. I don't think you can live that way."