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DPR Takes Action Against Disrespectful Behavior and Profanity

AUGUST 14TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Dexter, Missouri - A walk in the park is more than just a nice way to spend an afternoon. It is essential component for great health! Dexter Parks and Recreation has recently had some challenges at one of their heavily utilized parks and are now taking a stand against disrespectful behavior and profanity.

After receiving complaints of profanity and disrespect with many of the incidents involved groups of congregating teens and young adults on the basketball courts, city leaders got involved. The park in question is West Park. It is located on Business Highway 60 just across from the Stoddard County Ambulance District.

West park is very popular, especially with families and young children. Over the past few months, Dexter Police Dept. has been called due to teenagers or young adults acting disorderly. Things kept getting worse. More trash was left on the ground and on the tables in the pavilions. DPR employees were having to go and spend extra time at the park to clean it up so people could enjoy their surroundings without looking at someone's litter. The pavilion was even vandalized.

More complaints were steadily streaming into the office over the next few months to the point that DPR employees were sitting at the park observing basketball games and people using the park. Local residents began calling and letting the Dexter Parks know they would not be bringing their children back and that's when the Parks Dept. asked the police to step up patrols.

One of the goals of DPR is to try and prohibit conduct in the park before it reaches the level of a fight.

"Tempers flare, fights start and then some innocent child is going to get hurt," stated Jamie Rowe, Dexter Parks and Recreation Director. "That's not what we want. We want a safe environment for everyone to enjoy."

However in August a fight did ensue and a person was injured. Something had to change!

On Wednesday, August 9th after a long discussion at their board meeting, the Dexter Parks and Recreation Department decided to take the basketball goals and backboards down at West Park.

This is a temporary solution and the goals will be returned; however there is no date and it won't be anytime soon. The local Dexter Juvenile Officer also suggested that if the goals were removed this would also send a message that their behavior will not be tolerated at the park.

"We want to keep this park a family oriented place for everyone to use, but it has to be maintained in a safe setting," commented Jamie Rowe, DPR Director.

Simple cursing in front of someone in public is protected speech; however if that cursing incites a fight or is directed at a person or persons then it becomes disrespectful and can be considered as threatening behavior.

"They think it's their right to freedom of speech," stated Dexter Police Chief, Sammy Stone. "What they're doing is harassing a lot of the other people who use this park. A lot of parents who use this park don't want their children to be exposed to this profanity,"

"The language is atrocious and we're not going to put up with it, and they were warned multiple times. It didn't do any good, so we took the basketball goals down." Rowe said.

"We want everyone to come and enjoy the park," commented Rowe. "That's the purpose of a park to be used for birthday parties, walking, playing basketball and utilize the playground equipment. We even added a tennis court and striped a pickle ball area. We just want people to feel safe and welcomed at the park."

Some larger cities in Missouri and other states now have "no profanity" ordinances in their city parks. They give out tickets just like for littering, fighting, or vandalism.

"This is a sad situation because it costs the community and affects the families who could be enjoying the wonderful playground we have at West Park," commented a local walker who wished to remain anonymous. "I want to thank police for their hard work as well as the people in the community who are letting the parks people know about their behavior."

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