



Private security patrol hired for Boystown

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Enhanced security team creates safer environment along North Halsted

CHICAGO, IL -- A private security team of armed officers, wearing green shirts and bullet proof vests, has been hired to maintain safety in Boystown and the North Halsted Street entertainment district.

The enhanced and more visible security team started patrolling North Halsted this past weekend and consists of off-duty law enforcement officers hired by the [Northalsted Business Alliance](#) (NHBA), a non-profit group representing more than 80 businesses along North Halsted St. from Barry to Irving Park Road.

"Our aim has always been to provide a fun and safe environment for residents and patrons," NHBA said in a statement released to ChicagoPride.com. "To that end, Northalsted Business Alliance continually evaluates security and safety issues for the neighborhood."

Since a video recording-gone-viral showing a late night stabbing in the heart of the Boystown neighborhood in July 2011, the debate over crime and racial tension in the city's LGBT community has continued to escalate.

The video, which showed a 25-year-old man being punched, kicked and stabbed by a group of almost a dozen youth prompted some in the community, largely centered around a Facebook group called "Take Back Boystown," to criticize the amount of crime in the area and accuse area service providers for attracting individuals who caused problems.

Those accusations angered some LGBT groups and the debate hit its peak at a July 2011 CAPS meeting.

This spring - as soon as temperatures heated up - the Boystown neighborhood again filled with displaced and often homeless youth. Following a series of robberies and assaults in the neighborhood from March through June, concerns over neighborhood safety grew and racial tensions appeared to reignite.

Residents complain that large groups of loitering youth block building entrances, sidewalks and streets while dancing and yelling well past curfew. Critics argue Boystown is the only area where LGBT youth feel accepted. The debate continues on "Take Back Boystown."

Taking a proactive approach, NHBA contacted New England Security, a private security firm, to provide a more safe and secure area for local residents and patrons.

"We feel strongly in the mission to create a safe and welcoming environment for all to enjoy," said Paul Cannella, [Scarlet Bar](#) and [Taverna 750](#) owner and NHBA member. "While we of course have business investments in the area, we are residents and patrons of the neighborhood and want to enjoy it too."

Cannella and several other business owners along North Halsted told ChicagoPride.com that they have found the added security beneficial for business.

"I can't tell you how many people asked questions about it and thanked me for helping implement this," commented Cannella. "Our door personnel reported little or no incidents on the nights the force was in place, and I personally walked the street to meet with the officers and gauge the feeling on the street. I was very happy with what I saw, and I honestly felt safer without a doubt."

The use of night security is not a new approach for NHBA; however, the group admitted the new security team coupled with a few changes - including green security uniforms and vests - has increased visibility.

"We're trying something a little different than in the past," NHBA Executive Director Jay Lyon told ChicagoPride.com. "We've had security for several years. We've tweaked it a little bit."

Lyon didn't provide further details of the security team - including number of officers, times and days of patrols - for safety and planning purposes.

Cannella called the security team a "modification and improvement over last year's security."

44th Ward Alderman Tom Tunney supports NHBA's decision to add private security, which is not uncommon in Chicago. Tunney has worked with the Chicago Police Department to designate a portion of the Lakeview area, including North Halsted, as an entertainment district. The designation would mean a specific night tactical detail would be added for the area.

According to Lyon, the enhanced security will continue at least through Market Days weekend, August 11 and 12. Funds for NHBA come from concession stands, festival entry and local business owners.

"This was clearly a huge win in my eyes, and a tremendous step in the right direction," concluded Cannella.