

Stop the Violence rally gets word out

By Jared Fields

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The vision of Saturday's Stop the Violence, Start the Love rally is what hip-hop artist Shonlock said got him to come perform.

"Not everybody in the church is willing enough to reach out," said Shonlock, who tours with and choreographs Christian music's TobyMac. "I give (Chad Mitchell) props for having heart and passion."

Mitchell, pastor of Mission Abilene, and his friend, police officer Jeff Hartmankok, organized the first rally in 2008 after the shooting death of Albert Cadena.

The first rally was held in Nelson Park to honor people who died because of violence. Mitchell has had four members of his church become victims of violence. Three have died.

This year's event at Abilene Civic Center featured almost 30 booths, exhibits and activities, as well as speakers and musical artists.

Proceeds benefit the Regional Crime Victim Crisis Center in Abilene, a nonprofit agency that strives to meet the needs of and provide resources to victims and their families.

"It's been amazing to watch," Mitchell said of the event's growth.

The goal, he said, is to give victims of violence and their families a place to speak and raise awareness in the community.

And to help achieve that end, Guardian Angels founder Curtis Sliwa spoke at the event.

Sliwa created the Guardian Angels in New York City more than 30 years ago in an effort to reduce crime he saw. Since then, the organization has spread to 14 countries and 140 cities.

But the Abilene visit was more than a chance to speak about violence, he said.

With Mitchell, Sliwa visited Abilene neighborhoods to gauge if Abilene could support a Guardian Angels chapter.

As for upcoming Stop the Violence, Start the Love events, Mitchell said he plans to make it into a nonprofit organization that holds multiple events each year.

Mitchell said next year's event, planned for September, is booked for the entire Civic Center.

But for Saturday, the event was just about the idea of stopping the violence.

“I don’t think there’s anything else going on to let people tell their stories,” said Hartmankok. “Chad always advocated that, even if it’s one person.”



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