

## **MAYOR MARVIN'S COLUMN**

During the past week, residents have contacted me justifiably concerned about recent incidents involving groups of youth in our Village on weekend nights.

The following is a narrative of what has transpired and what we are doing about it.

In the past several months, two Village teens were harassed and then accosted resulting in minor bodily harm. On January 9<sup>th</sup>, a teen was assaulted on Garden Avenue. Our police officers have arrested and charged a youth in the most recent incident. What usually transpires is that groups of Village teens cross paths with groups from other communities with the end result often teasing and "trash talking" emboldened by the group mentality. These interactions led to the recent incident of physical harm against a Village teen as well as a similar occurrence in November.

Based on past experience, it has been warm spring and summer nights that attract groups of youth to congregate in our Village. The arrival of large groups of teens in town on sub-freezing nights was both unanticipated and unprecedented. Our police department is very mindful of not unnecessarily over staffing incurring expensive overtime but they are quick to react when additional staffing is clearly warranted.

As a result of the recent incidents, four additional officers and a supervisor have been added to the usual complement of officers. Our added police presence includes officers on foot as well as in marked and unmarked cars.

This past Friday, 50 to 60 teens came to the Village but were quite frustrated by the increased police presence and departed early. On Saturday night, the number of visiting teens dropped to less than half the Friday number.

It is my view that we have become a victim of our success because the Village is known as a very safe and convenient place to "hang out". With a train station in the center of our downtown, many young people are arriving by Metro North of late. Quite incredibly, others are dropped off by parents who determined Bronxville is a worry free place to leave their teens for an evening out.

I welcome anyone who wants to enjoy our Village by patronizing our merchants, attending a lecture, movie or sporting event or just meeting a friend for dinner, ice cream, coffee or conversation.

However you are not welcome, resident or non-resident, if your only intent is to hang out and disturb or harass, block sidewalks, litter or speak in loud and abusive tones.

As a parent of a teenager, I find it unacceptable to condone parental behavior that involves driving children five to ten miles on a weekend evening to leave them in other communities miles from parental monitoring. Our Village is a welcoming destination, but not a babysitter and this practice will not be tolerated. To that end, our police officers do not hesitate to stop arriving parents and question those doing just this.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no “loitering law” that applies to large groups simply congregating. To rise to the penal law violation of “disorderly conduct”, there must be a public disturbance created by the group – or they must be congregating in a way that blocks a sidewalk or public highway and it must be witnessed by a police officer in order to arrest the offender. Simple violations of the Code of the Village of Bronxville or the New York State Vehicle and Traffic Law such as “jaywalking” are enforced by the issuance of an appearance ticket. Keep in mind that all of these offenses are only applicable to teens 16 and older.

As a consequence, our police officers have found that the most effective tool to curb aberrant teen behavior is to detain the youth and require a parent to pick them up.

Our Village has several unique characteristics that make safeguarding the peace and quiet paramount. Many of our residents live in or adjacent to our business district and school property. They deserve quiet and tranquility at the end of a business day. Also many residents, including my family, moved to the Village precisely because it afforded a unique level of freedom and safety for our children. The experience of walking to town with friends provides an opportunity for maturing independence. This freedom is a defining rite of passage in our Village and a tradition to be cherished.

Please tell your children never to hesitate to call our police desk if they feel uncomfortable in any situation. Our officers are here to help and they are only seconds away even on normal nights without the increased complement of officers.

I assure you that all of us in Village government hold dear the freedom, safety and quality of life that defines our Village as a special place to live.

We will continue to aggressively monitor the current situation, declaring Bronxville inhospitable to anyone who disregards standards of acceptable behavior, ever mindful of the individual rights of citizens.