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Copter's visit part of neighborhood crime-fighting event

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ROCKFORD — The whiff of hot dogs on the grill. Children taking much delight in soaking adults in the dunk

And a police helicopter landing in a neighborhood park prompting an inquisitive youngster to ask the nearest Jefferson, "Does the helicopter have missiles on it?"

An even more inquisitive alderman asked, "When did we get a helicopter? I'm going to ask the chief whose I

The picture-perfect landing of the Law Enforcement Aviation Coalition helicopter and the humorous bits of cl and smells Tuesday at this year's National Night Out celebration held at Nelson Park.

Hundreds flocked to the Seminary Street Park to make a night of the free food and fun and wealth of inform:

National Night Out is billed as America's Night Out Against Crime. It's a show of unity between neighbors, p reclaim neighborhoods from those who drive residents and children indoors with acts of violence.

Once held yearly in Davis Park, Rockford is now hosting the event in different wards. Last year's event was hosted in the Fifth Ward, home to first-year Ald. Venita Hervey and to the ORCHiD Third Union College

"This is about making our streets safe for our kids," Hervey said. "The streets don't belong to the drug dealer us."

Joe Owen, a member of the ORCHiD neighborhood association, said crime is down in his neighborhood bec police.

"Crime has been reduced significantly in our neighborhood over the last four years, ever since we dedicated neighbors see crime going down, it empowers them. They'll actually go out and tell people who pull up in ca no longer lives here."

While the effect of National Night Out is hard to measure, Rockford police Sgt. Marc Welsh said every year i and existing groups are strengthened and re-energized because of NNO.

Winnebago County Sheriff Dick Meyers echoed Welsh's remarks and said NNO is about interaction between

one of more than 1,000 people to attend NNO activities at Machesney Crossings, a new venue in Machesney Park. Officials said they outgrew the spacious lawns of the Village Hall and moved to the southeast corner of North Park. With the help of North Park firefighters, children sprayed water at targets and took in a K-9 demonstration.

In Belvidere, 11 different neighborhoods hosted a "going away party for crime."

Belvidere police Chief Jan Noble, who is out of town attending a Small and Rural Law Enforcement Summit of Justice, said 80 percent of the police departments in the U.S. are small and rural and rely on community ties in their neighborhoods.

"That's the partnerships that police departments strive for," he said.

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