

Mayor Carl Officer back in command in E. St. Louis

By Alvin A. Reid.

Special to Sentinel-Voice

EAST ST. LOUIS (NNPA)—Mayor Carl Officer, voted out of office 12 years ago, is now officially back at the helm of this city.

He says he's older, wiser and ready to continue the city's economic turnaround—and he still calls East St. Louis "a tough town."

"First and foremost is keeping people safe. Every street light is going to be working. There are going to be enough police on the streets," he said.

Officer was sworn in recently, and immediately said it "was a time of hope."

He appeared on Channel 9's "In The Loop," and detailed what East St. Louis needs—and doesn't want—on the road to recovery.

"We don't need the strip clubs. We haven't needed

them in the past and we don't need them now. There are plenty of places surrounding (East St. Louis) for people who want that kind of entertainment. I don't see that changing during an Officer administration," he said.

During his inauguration speech, Officer said every street in the city will be resurfaced in a year and new curbs and sidewalks are part of the plan. The city can pay for it with half of a \$100 million bond issue.

In addition, he said he plans to spend \$25 million in bond revenue to refurbish Collinsville Avenue in downtown East St. Louis. Merchants would share space with new tenants at a new shopping center that Officer says will rise at Collinsville and Martin Luther King Drive.

"You and I can restore the city," he told a standing-room

only crowd at the East St. Louis City Hall.

Officer called himself a former "playboy," during his "In The Loop" interview, but said his two-year-old daughter has settled him down.

"I'm quite different than the man who was sworn in at 27," he said.

When asked about carrying a gun when he was formerly the mayor, Officer said East St. Louis remains a "tough town."

"The last city manager was murdered," Officer said bluntly, referring to the death of Harvey Henderson, whose body was found last fall after

he allegedly fell over the raised embankment of the Poplar Street Bridge.

"Yes, he was murdered. He was about to blow the whistle on some folks."

Officer said control of the city's multi-million dollar budget was the cause of Henderson's death. "Who are we kidding? He was murdered," Officer said.

While the city still holds a "dangerous" image, Officer said, "who would have thought little White ladies would be coming across the bridge to have fun, dine and stay until 2 a.m. in the morning years ago," referring to

the popular Casino Queen gambling facility.

He said he had no interest in luring the Cardinals to the East Side, "because St. Louis is my suburb. The best deal is to drive to the Metro stop in St. Louis, park for free, and take the train to the game. Now the only question is, 'how long am I going to let (Cardinal fans) park for free,'" he said with a smile.

He said an announcement is forthcoming about residential plans for the East Side riverfront, a dream he had during his first three terms as mayor. It's going to happen. If you look at the records,

Carl Officer bought the land where the Casino Queen now stands. There will be housing.

Officer said he is also looking forward to working with Democratic Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

"He's the first in a long time. Things are falling into place for us," said Officer, who added that he has supported "many" state representatives and senatorial candidates financially during his years out of office.

"That will hopefully have benefits, too," he said.

Alvin A. Reid writes for the St. Louis American.

Jury clears NAACP leader in protest over shooting

By Chris B. Bennett

SEATTLE (NNPA) — After five hours of deliberation, a jury found Seattle NAACP president, Carl Mack, not guilty of pedestrian interference when he led a peaceful group of demonstrators in downtown Seattle last October. The group was protesting the shooting death of Robert Thomas Sr., an African-American, by off-duty King County deputy sheriff Mel Miller, who is White.

Mack was arrested minutes after giving a speech calling for a federal investigation into the April 2002 shooting. Mack took over the position at the NAACP in a landslide victory one-month after his arrest.

The four-day trial, which drew many supporters, was viewed by many in the African-American community as a waste of time and taxpayers' money.

"To put \$100,000 into a defense to prove a political point was a clear example of excessive government waste," said Chris H. Bennett, chairman of the Z-Twins radio stations and The Seattle Medium Newspaper Group. "City attorney Tom Carr and his staff should be ashamed of themselves, and the City Council should hold them accountable from a budgetary standpoint to replace the frivolous political price that just occurred."

The alleged infraction suggested that Mack intended to be arrested as he "zig-zagged" across a busy intersection in an effort to make a point. The city argued that Mack stepped into the intersection despite warnings from police that traffic laws would be rigidly enforced that day. However, a videotape of the incident shows that Mack was arrested before he stepped into the street, and that he was attempting to legally cross.

If convicted, Mack would have faced up to 90 days in jail and a maximum fine of \$1,000. The city offered to dismiss the misdemeanor charge if Mack paid a \$75 fine, but he refused.

Mack said the trial came down to the words of a police officer who testified that it was "immaterial" whether Mack had a green light when he stepped into the street.

"That's what this is really all about," Mack said. "The law says that when it comes to Black folks, you can beat us, shoot us, kill us and it's always immaterial."

Seattle Municipal Court Judge Kimi Kondo, who presided over the case, was not present in the courtroom to read or hear the verdict from the jury. Kondo could have dismissed the case before it went to trial but failed to do so despite the videotaped evidence presented.

"I'm glad Mr. Mack didn't pay the fine and I'm glad he did go to trial so the people can see how ridiculous the charges

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