

QUESTIONS BEING ASKED ABOUT PENNSYLVANIA WHITE POWER CONCERT

Written by OPP HQ

Saturday, 27 October 2012 19:49 - Last Updated Monday, 19 November 2012 20:55



We should note that two Harrisburg, PA area newspapers passed on this article about the Keystone State "Skinheads" white power concert 30 minutes or so from the city, the Patriot-News who reportedly promised to publish it and then balked with no explanation at all, and the New Era/Intelligencer-Journal because by the time they got it the story was a month old. It's still an important piece, however, which is why we opted to run it.

John Duffy

LEBANON, PA--A concert one month ago at Lebanon County fire hall and sponsored by a Pennsylvania-based white supremacist group has many civil rights activists and some local government officials asking why the company has allowed the group to hold multiple events there.

On Saturday, September 8, a concert promoted by Keystone State Skinheads was held at a banquet hall attached to Prescott Community Fire Company in East Lebanon Township. Police say the show ended without incident.

Fire company officials would not speak on the record regarding the event. Corbin Hall, owner of the catering firm that leases the hall from the fire company said he was unaware that a white supremacist organization had booked the event in order to present bands that advocate racist ideologies and even violence.

But South Lebanon Township chief of police Michael Lesher said that this was not the first time the Prescott hall has hosted a KSS-sponsored event.

"There definitely have been others." Lesher could not recount how many, but did confirm a February 2009 event KSS held there called Uprising 2009. "Every time we have taken special precautions to be ready," the chief said. None of the events have required police to be dispatched.

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South Lebanon Township Manager Curt Kulp was unaware of the September 8 event. "But this is pretty upsetting to hear about." The matter was not discussed at the regular September 25 meeting of the township's Board of Supervisors, but Kulp met privately Monday October 1 with fire company leaders. The details of that meeting have not been made public.

In late July an announcement for the show was posted on Stormfront, the largest Internet discussion forum for racist skinheads, white supremacists, and other right-wing extremists. Two bands were announced initially with the promise of further acts to be added.

Just after Wade Michael Page shot to death six worshipers at a Sikh temple in suburban Milwaukee on August 6, organizers added the group 13 Knots to the bill, one of several hate rock bands in which Page had once played guitar.

The band 13 Knots still has pictures of Wade with posing with band members on its MySpace page.

Elaine's Catering hosts regular functions there and provided food and beverage for the KSS show and is owned by Hall. "When I booked the event I was told it was a battle of the bands," Hall said the week following the show.

"We don't discriminate against anyone who wants to rent the hall, and we don't ask questions about who they are or what they are doing. So long as they don't get out of control and trash the place," Hall says, there is no problem. "And they didn't."

Keystone State Skinheads—sometimes known as Keystone United—formed in the Harrisburg area in 2002 and quickly spread across the commonwealth and into neighboring states, recruiting new members and absorbing smaller crews.

Since the group's formation, several former members have been arrested on felony charges up to and including murder, according to a dossier published by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which claimed Keystone was at one time the largest and most dangerous racist skinhead crew in the U.S.

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Shortly after 6 p.m. on the night of the show, several skinheads and supporters began gathering at a nearby shopping center parking lot just inside Lebanon borough. Typical of white power rock shows, the location had been kept secret until the previous afternoon.

An hour later, several cars, some with plates from as far away as Tennessee and Florida, made the five minute drive to the hall, located in near the intersection of Prescott Road and East King Street. About 30 cars remained parked outside the hall most of the evening.

Hall says he showed up to work the event itself but only then learned the identity of the group that booked it. Up until he showed up Saturday night, Corbin states, he had never knowingly done business with Keystone State Skinheads or any other white supremacist group.

Knowing now he has in fact done business with them, Hall says he would have second thoughts about doing so in the future. "I will have to cross that river when I come to it."

Philadelphia resident Dominic Schiavello, however, was once a member of a hardcore metal band called MRSA that in 2009 was booked to play "Uprise 2009" at Prescott, unaware of who had hired them.

Before what Schiavello described as a lower turnout than had been expected, the band played their set and quickly left.

Schiavello and other members of MRSA have expressed that they do not share the same views as Keystone, and said the group has had no further contact with the organizers. "It was definitely not our scene," he said. The group disbanded within a year.

Throughout most of the last decade, KSS staged numerous concerts each year, but that number had dropped to almost zero recently, according to Barry Morrison, a spokesman at the Philadelphia office of Anti-Defamation League.

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The recent show at Prescott was the first major show KSS had attempted in more than a year, he said.

“We are well aware that they have had a number of events at that facility. Like with many volunteer fire companies, it may just be that they need the money,” Morrison said. “But we have never communicated directly.”

It was the Philadelphia-based One People's Project that first alerted local media of the planned event. The group, headed by Daryle Lamont Jenkins, made the announcement in an attempt to warn local owners of bars, nightclubs, and other venues.

“Many times skinheads will book a venue and the owner has no idea who he or she might be dealing with,” he explained. “So they get suckered into hosting these groups and suffer because of the association, and that's not fair.”

Venues oftentimes just let the show happen once it gets underway, Jenkins said, rather than risk violence.

His organization believes that Prescott has been the home to at least three previous Keystone concerts between 2006 and 2009 (including the event at which MRSA performed), but could not substantiate that count definitively.

Jenkins added that it is extremely rare, almost unheard of in fact, that a hate group would return to the same venue this many times. “Once it gets out that they've been there, they are usually told to not come back.”

Residents however should not take this to mean that Keystone is a powerful organization, he said. “Today's skinheads are weaker, and more paranoid than those of say twenty years ago. But at the same time that doesn't mean we shouldn't take them seriously. As we so tragically saw in Wisconsin, it only takes one.”

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An organization that serves the community and benefits from tax dollars doing business for at least four years, even if through an intermediary, with a violently racist group should be something of concern for residents, insisted Jenkins.

However, according to Mary Catherine Parker, an attorney with the Pennsylvania office of the American Civil Liberties Union, there is almost nothing legally that can be done to prevent any organization, even a private one that serves the public, from hosting such groups in the future.

"It's really a matter of the contract between the fire company and the caterer," she explained. "The benefit for Keystone holding such an event at a private facility as opposed to a public one is that they have the right to refuse anyone who they don't want to admit."

Despite the legal protection, says Jenkins, the community itself has a right to know if an organization with a history of intimidation, incendiary speech, and outright violence is meeting in their midst.

"We should not be afraid of them and hide inside our houses," he said. "When they are active in our communities, we need to speak up."