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Surrounding the Alamo ministries



Staff photo by Evan Lewis

A guard with R.G. Security of Wake Village, Texas, sits at the intersection of South Circle Drive and a private drive. Recently, the ministry started limiting access to a private drive off of South Circle Drive.

Residents suspicious of restriction onto street

By JIM WILLIAMSON
Texarkana Gazette

FOUKE, Ark.—After a bullet hit one of the church windows, Tony Alamo Ministries hired a security company to watch for possible troublemakers.

"Somebody fired a gun at the church windows and put a hole in it. It could have killed somebody," said Alamo in a telephone interview Tuesday.

But concern has grown among Fouke residents about why armed security guards with R&G Securities has stopped vehicles from driving onto South Circle Drive and the property of the Tony Alamo Christian Ministries.

"No other church in Fouke has to have security guards," said Betty Mixon, a resident of the town and wife of Roger Mixon, pastor of the United Pentecostal Church and a Fouke city council member.

The Texarkana Gazette was contacted about two weeks ago by frustrated and suspicious residents about the security company blocking access to the city street.

Since that time, a change has been made.

"We've got it settled and it's not going to be closed off," Fouke Mayor Cecil Smith said Monday afternoon about the

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Staff photo by Evan Lewis

Bill, a member of the Tony Alamo ministry, works on flower beds along South Circle Drive Tuesday afternoon in Fouke, Ark.

Alamo

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security company blocking access to the street.

Alamo said the shooting incident occurred about six months ago and R&G Security was hired to protect the entrances to the property. The security company is paid about \$6,000 every two weeks to guard the entrance to South Circle Drive. The church has purchased the property on both sides of the street, which is about 500 feet in length, Alamo said.

Complaints about the street not being accessible were made to Alamo and the mayor.

Alamo said the mayor and some of the people who work in city hall have attended the church and understand the situation about security. Alamo said the security company has been ordered to stay at the end of the dead-end street and not to stop anyone.

"We've asked them to just write down their license plate number," said Alamo on Tuesday.

Don Zimmerman, the executive director of the Arkansas Municipal League, said state law requires a public hearing to abandon or vacate a street.

"It requires all adjoining land owners to be contacted and a petition presented to the city requesting the action," said Zimmerman.

Fouke city officials said no formal request to abandon or vacate the street has been made by Alamo Ministries.

Alamo said after the shooting incident, he decided to hire the security company.

"I think it's becoming in vogue to be a terrorist. I felt a need for security. People blow up churches and have burned down black churches. I thought it would be good to have security instead of having people run over our flowers and at least show people we have security. That's why we did it," said Alamo.

"Some of the people started saying it was a city street but we had people we wanted to protect. We have three or four black people out here (living on South Circle Drive) and the community, years ago, was known as anti-black, but things have changed out here and they don't have trouble at all," said Alamo.

Smith received reports of someone making racial slurs at some of the residents on South Circle Drive.

"They've been threatened before and this is not their first rodeo. It's no fabricated call, it was real," said Smith.

Fouke city marshals and Miller County sheriff's deputies have responded to South Circle Drive on complaints of racial slurs, said Melanie Bottoms, Fouke city secretary.

Roger Mixon said several citizens have come to him to complain about guards on the street and not being allowed to pass by them. They're told it's a private drive and is part of the Alamo Ministry, according to reports Mixon receives.

Late last year and earlier this year, Mixon said, a group of citizens complained to the council.

Mixon described how he came into Fouke a few weeks ago at 11 p.m. and a car was in the middle of South Circle Drive with the doors open facing U.S. Highway 71.

A guard was standing there.

"It's a shame to come into Fouke and be greeted like that. The secrecy disturbs us," said Mixon. "We feel like it needs to be an open street since the street is dedicated. Citizens should not feel threatened when they drive on a street."

Judy Frazier recalled the incident when she drove to the main building and "was admiring how pretty the flowers were and had no idea I couldn't get through."

"At the top of the hill, the street was blocked off. I was shocked and concerned. A white pickup truck came out behind me and stopped me. He had a rifle or shotgun. He told me I had no business up there."

I was livid to put it mildly. I'm concerned about the past history of Tony Alamo. Who picked Fouke? It's a church and it's beginning to hide behind the veil of secrecy. If they have nothing to hide, then why hide," Frazier said.

Alamo says guns were not present.

"We don't have guns. We don't have drugs. We don't even have a squirt gun or a toy gun and no alcohol," he said.

Mike Brewer, pastor of the Calvary Holiness Church, drove on the street Aug. 22.

"As soon as I pulled up to the street, a security guard came down and said his name was C. Johnson and told me I was on private property and to back down the hill. I told him it was a city street," said Brewer.

Brewer eventually left the area.

Doris Sanders said the guards told her to leave when she was helping her niece, Karen Crabtree, who was searching for her dog. Crabtree was "frantic" and searched the nearby roads and then drove up to the top of the hill.

"The guards surrounded us and told us to back down the hill. They would not let me turn around. He put his hands on the hood of my car. The guards told me to back down to Highway 71 and not to drive back up the hill," said Sanders.

Alamo has been described in national news media accounts as a "charismatic evangelist" who was convicted and served a federal prison sentence for evading federal income taxes.

In the telephone interview with the Gazette Tuesday, Alamo said he was "railroaded into prison on false charges of tax evasion."

"The government used a bunch of back sliders to testify against me and let some out of prison to falsely testify against me," said Alamo.

While serving his federal prison sentences, Alamo was transferred to the federal prison in Texarkana, Texas.

"A lot of the people of the church and family wanted to visit me and back then the hotel

accommodations in Texarkana were not as great as they are now," said Alamo.

"They bought an inexpensive house in Fouke. I had nothing to do with that. When I got out, the people liked it here and organized a church out here and it had a grocery store. It was cramped and they used scrap lumber to build an addition on the house. They cleared the poison oak and cleaned out an area to build a swimming pool and a gazebo," said Alamo. He has lived in the area for nine years.

"I've invited the whole town to go swimming. If they want to have a birthday party for their kids, I've invited them to come up here. I took one of the complainants around and showed him everything including the merry-go-round," said Alamo. "I've been trying to be friends with the people here since I've been here."

The ministry donated \$60,000 to build a city park, donated the money to purchase the "Jaws of Life" extrication equipment and during the ice storm of 2000, Alamo rented a generator to provide electricity on an emergency basis in Fouke.

"I've been good to people who don't have anything and I've been good to people who have everything. I've known five presidents since JFK. Ronald Reagan thought I was good. Bill Clinton mentioned me in his book. He would come to my restaurant in Alma. President Bush has sent 17 e-mails to me about the Middle East. If they thought I was a bad guy, I don't know why they're asking me to do things for them," said Alamo.

But Alamo said the church needs security.

"How would you like it if someone fired a gun at you or your church. Wouldn't you want to hire a security company," asked Alamo.