

Community Comment – October 10th, 2016

By Jon Sapper

Chicago

I'd never been to Chicago. Having read about the city, its images were in my mind as I was flying across the country and I was hoping I wouldn't be staying anywhere near the parts of the city infamous for the gun violence and number of murders. It truly is an astonishing number. During the five days I was there, thirteen people were shot to death. Nine more have been shot and killed the first five days of October. September witnessed 61 murders by gunshots with an additional 302 wounded. A person is shot every two hours in Chicago and of the 516 shooting deaths this year, only six were police involved. These kinds of numbers are reminiscent of past reports from war zones.

As I got off the plane, I was told downtown was 20 miles away and could take a cab. That's a long cab ride, but OK. I approached a cabbie outside and asked him how much for the fare. He said, "Sixty dollars". Well, I'm not paying sixty dollars for a cab ride. I found out I could take the subway train for five bucks. I'm glad it was in the middle of the afternoon, and although I appreciated the cultural experience, I wouldn't do it after dark. In fact, when I was on the train, I thought, this might be a wonderful Community Comment topic.....if I make it back. After a train transfer and a few blocks of walking, I made it to the hotel. This was in an area called the Magnificent Mile.

Walking around the streets that were filled with well-dressed ladies and gents, it became apparent how that section of the city got its name. Upscale European and American retail, high end restaurants and a well-positioned store called the Hershey Chocolate Store (that was my favorite) dotted the Magnificent Mile. Incredible landscaping with plants and flowers lined the streets and it was obvious great care was taken to create an air of luxury.

Street artists engaged large crowds and many enthusiastically tossed coins and dollar bills into the collection hats. As I was watching a talented mime, I almost tripped over a homeless man who was sitting quietly with his head down, hoping that you would read his sign and drop some money into his cup. His message was one of despair, not hope. As I walked several blocks, there were many just like

him, including some families where children were doing the asking for their parents. I didn't like that part.

The Magnificent Mile earned its name. As I was getting ready to come home, I read their local paper and the three top stories were; what to do with the mentally ill and homeless population, what to do about the increasing crime and how to further develop their waterfront. I could have stayed home and read the same articles. And yes, I took a cab back to the airport.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.