

## **Jerry Bell Death threat accompanies racism on the Detroit river**

By Diane Bukowski (submitted to Michigan Citizen, 2010, not published)

DETROIT – An internet death threat against eastside Detroiter Jerry Bell was posted June 17 on a message board used by American Power Boat Association (APBA) members. Bell is one of a handful of qualified Black inboard hydroplane racers in the U.S.

Accompanying the threat was a media release from the Rev. Horace Sheffield III and Bell announcing a press conference at Sheffield's New Galilee Baptist Church. Sheffield, Bell, Minister Malik Shabazz of the New Marcy Garvey Movement, John Telford of the Team for Justice, and former State Rep. Mary Waters spoke at the conference June 16 in addition to Bell his crew member Martez Wilkerson, and community supporter Bernice Wilson.

The speakers decried the exclusion of Bell from this year's River Days Festival, held June 18-20. Bell ran an exhibition race during last year's festival. He, Wilkerson and Telford said the APBA has rigged Detroit River races, including the Gold Cup, to prevent Bell from competing.

"Ewe be haten on Jerry T. al da time. I gunna cap yo ass muthafucka four yo s—t," said the message from [phil.mitchell1@comcast.net](mailto:phil.mitchell1@comcast.net). "For a side note, WHAT A CROCK OF S—T! He's a father of four. How many women? Six? So he's a father and will take his GNH/UL on a 2.5m course with no safety/rescue boats? He's also an idiot."

Comments have been requested from Detroit Mayor Dave Bing, Police Chief Warren Evans and the City Council. Bell earlier gave a presentation in front of Council, during which William Smith of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy (DRC), which hosts River Days, promised that Bell would participate again this year.

Law enforcement sources have identified Mitchell as resident of Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Comments from Mitchell and from Eden Prairie's city manager, city council and police chief have also been requested.

Mitchell responded, "A death threat against Jerry Bell? Far from it. My comment was concerning his running of his boat, on the Detroit River, on a 2.5mile course, trapped into a safety capsule without adequate safety and rescue divers on hand. I would deem anyone who would do that stunt an idiot.

"If you are truly a reporter for the publication then you also know that I posted a second notice on the same inboard hydroplane racing site stating that the posting you show below was a joke intended not for general distribution but for just a couple of my friends. It was my mistake and error that caused it to be posted to the general membership of that board."

Regarding Bell's exclusion from River Days, Rev. Sheffield said, "This typifies the elimination of Detroiters from activities that occur in Detroit utilizing city resources and tax dollars. To exclude an African-American man who can walk to the river from his home, who is qualified to compete, is an outrage."

He said “every dime” of public funding should be withdrawn from such events. The APBA plans to hold its annual Gold Cup Races this July using Erma Henderson Park as a launching point. Bell earlier asked the council to deny the APBA’s Gold Cup permit.

”This is nothing but racism and white supremacy,” said Minister Shabazz. “I call on the Mayor and the City Council to take immediate action in support of Jerry Bell.”

Bell became interested in powerboat racing as a child, when his mother took him to watch the races. He trained with Teddy Dudley, another African-American racer, in the 1990’s, then won a first place championship in 2000, and placed fourth in races in 2003 and 2004.

“I feel betrayed by the Mayor and Council,” Bell said. “They have representatives with the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC) and the DRC. The EDC [run by the DEGC] lied that I did not have a Coast Guard permit, but I have it right here.”

Bell said he and his crew had hoped to show Black youth in Detroit what they can accomplish, during this past Father’s Day weekend. **That was why he decided to run his own boat without a rescue team, with the approval of the Coast Guard and other agencies involved, who said they would clear a safe course for him. The Coast Guard prevented him from performing the run June 19 due to alleged scheduling conflicts.**

Wilkerson, however, said he has experienced nothing but sabotage by APBA members since Bell recruited him to his crew. The APBA denied Bell a chance to compete in the 100<sup>th</sup> running of the Gold Cup in 2008 by excluding his boat class.

This year, the APBA barred Bell from the Gold Cup, although it is allowing inflatable boats. Associations elsewhere in the U.S., the U.K, and other countries assure fairness by allowing all classes of boats to compete, according to Wikipedia.