

Cheektowaga Police, Buffalo Peacemakers work to ensure Walden Galleria safety

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CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. (WKBW) — One year ago today, chaos erupted inside the Walden Galleria . Boxing day, turned into a boxing match as fights broke out inside the mall. Several arrests, 22 calls and 3 fights sent the Galleria into lockdown.

Fast-forward a year and Cheektowaga Police and Buffalo peacemakers say they're prepared.

"We've met with the Galleria security, the NFTA, and the Buffalo Peacemakers and the plan is as always to provide safety and security," Cheektowaga Police Assistant Chief Michael Sliwinski said. He added, "This is certainly one of the busier times at the Walden Galleria."

"We just believe it's going to be peaceful atmosphere on today, tomorrow and throughout the whole entire year," Leonard Lane, a Buffalo Peacemakers board member and the person who oversees the Peacemakers at the Galleria, said.

Shortly after 2018's "mall brawl," authorities asked the Peacemakers for help. The group then began working alongside Cheektowaga Police, the NFTA and Galleria management and security.

"That combination has really served the mall really very well in terms of keeping things down," Buffalo Peacemakers coordinator Pastor James Giles said.

Sliwinski says in anticipation for another busy day-after-Christmas at the mall, mall management and police met about six weeks ago to discuss a game plan.

Assistant Chief Sliwinski says the Galleria is paying for 12 uniformed officers to be stationed inside the mall until January 1. Peacemakers are typically at the mall on the weekends, but this week, 8-12 Peacemakers will be strategically scattered across the mall.

"If there are issues we want to try and stop that as quick as we can," Sliwinski said.

Buffalo Peacemakers emphasize the importance of the parental escort policy . From 4 p.m. to close every Friday and Saturday, kids under 18 must be accompanied by someone 21 years or older.

"We're all partners, we all care about one another, we all love one another...as partners we know that we can have a safe place for not only our children, but for all those who visit the mall," Lane said.