

# Shootings shatter 'sacred ground' for city youths

By Gary Craig, Rochester Democrat & Chronicle



The basketball game at the Boys & Girls Club of Rochester on Wednesday night was a battle, with the scores reaching into the 100s and the contest not decided until the final minutes.

The crowd of close to 100 teens and young men and women was boisterous, but behaved. After the game, friends of the players and the teams themselves joshed with each other. This was a spirited way to end the summer basketball league.



Shortly after 11 p.m., the crowd emptied into the muggy air at the Boys & Girls Club parking lot; the joking and chatting continued.

Within minutes, three young men would be dead, each shot as a drive-by shooter sprayed the parking lot with gunfire. Four more – all of them reported to be men in their 20s – were wounded.

"This is the first time we've ever had anything like this," said Reggie Smith, who has worked at the Boys & Girls Club since 1992.

The Boys & Girls Club at 500 Genesee St. has long been a refuge for teenagers and kids trying to maintain distance from the crimes and drug-peddling in their neighborhoods. But, on Wednesday

night, the refuge was invaded by the very bloodshed that many teens worked so hard to avoid and escape.

"This is sacred ground," Anderson Allen, a Boys & Girls Club worker, said about the club as he tried to come to terms with the deaths of young men whom he knew.

### **Rochester suffers from the fatal disease of violence**

Jonah Barley, Raekwon Manigault and Johnny Johnson were killed in the mass shooting, according to sources and family members of the victims. Police Chief Michael Ciminelli declined to release the victims' names Thursday.

The mass shooting quickly became news beyond just Rochester, trending nationally on social media and making its way into international headlines. Elected officials and politicians weighed in about the callous disregard for life evident in the killings.

"The shooting that took place outside of the Boys & Girls Club on Genesee Street – an act that killed three young men and injured four others – is nothing less than heartbreaking, and I join with the people of Rochester in mourning this tragedy," said Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who said his administration would provide any help it can.

### **Community shocked, grieved**

Local community leaders and gang interdiction specialists suspect that gang activity and the escalation of a percolating dispute could have been the roots of the killings. But the shooting did not appear targeted, according to witnesses at the scene. Instead, the shooter unleashed a block-long barrage of gunfire – the staccato steady pops a likely indication of an automatic weapon.

Witnesses said they were unsure whether there was one shooter or more. Bullets shattered windows in nearby businesses and homes. Shots hit walls and windows at the Anthony L. Jordan Health Center, which is next to the Boys & Girls Club and has long provided health care for low-income residents in the neighborhood.

Ciminelli released few details about the shooting at a late afternoon news conference. Mayor Lovely Warren visited the scene of the killings Thursday morning, surrounded by media as she pledged that a vigilant investigation was underway to find the killers.

"Somebody made a decision last night that they were going to end someone's lives," she said. "That person that made that decision, we are going to bring them to justice."

Two of those wounded in the shooting were released from Strong Memorial Hospital by noon Thursday. Another was listed in satisfactory condition and one in guarded. Their names were not released.

Throughout the day Thursday, crowds gathered at the Boys & Girls Club parking lot to pray, grieve, console and embrace as the weather bounced between sunshine and showers. Makeshift vigils gave way to prayer circles, with some local elected officials joining the mix. Anger merged with angst; tears were plentiful.

"These kids are seeing (violence) weekly," said Toni Nelson, whose son was fatally shot in a Chili Avenue apartment in 2004. " ... This is terrorism in our streets."



A.J. Carter, a close friend of Barley's, was often in the arms of friends who hugged and comforted him at the Thursday afternoon vigil.

Barley, an infectious young man, had survived a serious car accident, said Carter, who marveled at his friend's strength.

"He was full of life," Carter said.

### **Violence in the streets**

Manigault, Johnson and Barley were part of the crowd at the game, a contest between organized basketball teams with teens of varying ages. The summer league includes players of such skill that college coaches sometimes come to the games to recruit, said Smith of the Boys & Girls Club.

Once the game ended -- the contest's margin was so narrow it was decided by free throws in the waning seconds -- the crowd moved peacefully to the parking lot. Smith and his colleagues encouraged the teens to disperse, and there was no trouble. Within minutes, the crowd of nearly 100 had shrunk to 15 or so.

And, then, mayhem.

According to witnesses, the vehicle used by the shooters came north along Genesee Street. The shooting started around the intersection with Flint Street, and continued for a block or more, ending around Hawley Street.

Moments before, Finesse McFadden had slapped hands goodbye with Barley. Barley slipped his headphones on, cranked up his music, and began to walk northbound.

McFadden walked with Manigault toward Flint. Then the shots erupted. Manigault fell; McFadden ran for safety.

"It was just crazy," McFadden said of the chaos.

He returned moments later, and went to Manigault, whom he'd known for years.

"Raekwon was talking. Then he started losing his voice."

McFadden said he saw his friend die on the pavement.

Flint Street resident Charlene Collier and her children were watching movies Wednesday night when she heard "about 15 gunshots" just outside her home. Collier grabbed her three kids, niece and nephew and "went to the ground."

"They were scared," she said. "I was scared."

She heard screaming, left her house and walked across the street to Genesee, where she saw three young males lying on the ground. Police had not yet arrived.

"I could see the smoke coming out of the bullet hole, coming out of the body. That's something you never forget." Collier said.

Jamila Hanna drove by the club shortly before the shooting, and saw her nephew, Jonah Barley, among a crowd of teens hanging out. Minutes later, at her nearby home, she received "a million calls in a minute" about the shooting she'd just missed. Shortly thereafter, she learned her nephew was dead.

"His smile was contagious," she said of Barley. "You'd never see Jonah without a smile on his face. He will be missed. He was so loved."



### **The investigation**

The police force was out in ample numbers Thursday, knocking on the doors of nearby residents, interviewing witnesses, keeping an eye on the vigils that continued throughout the day.

Ciminelli said the department would respond to the shootings with a combination of outreach and increased enforcement, including additional foot patrols, bringing known gang members in for conversations with police, and door-to-door interaction.

The Rochester Police Department, the Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms, Tobacco and Explosives, and Crime Stoppers offered a reward of up to \$10,000 for information leading to the arrest and successful prosecution of the crimes. Those with information can call 911, 311 or (585) 423-9300.

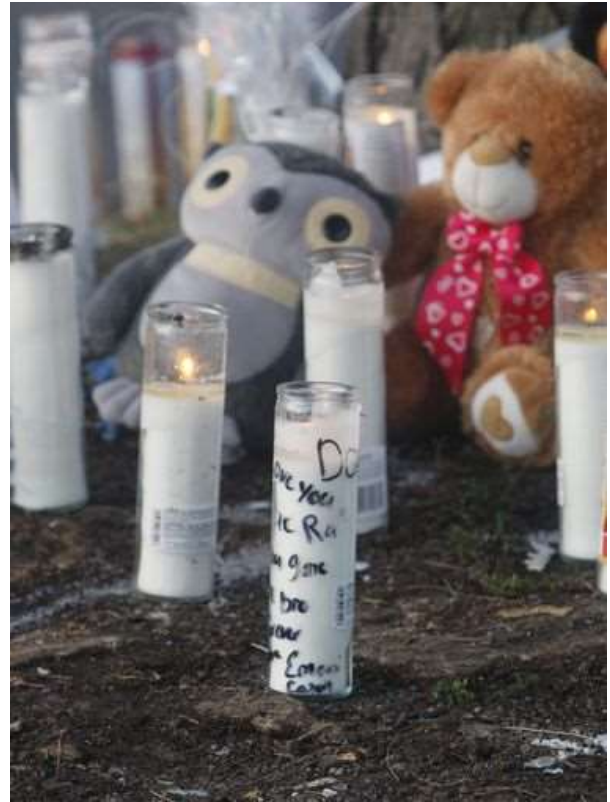
Residents at the vigils Thursday encouraged neighbors to come forward and work with police to find the killers.

"It's seven families, seven lives, but this whole community is in mourning," said Barley's aunt, Hanna.

Dez Starkes was home Thursday from a short break in his U.S. Air Force service. He and his younger brother, 16-year-old Cameron, walked to the Boys & Girls Club parking lot in the afternoon. Dez said he wanted to tell his brother that he should not accept a world of violence and killing.

"You can't desensitize yourself to it," he said. " ... I know it's a cliché saying it, but it really does start with you."

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2015/08/20/shootings-shatter-sacred-ground-city-youths/32064655/>



Rev. Artis White leads a group in prayer during a vigil at the site of the drive-by shooting on Genesee St. that left 3 dead and 4 injured.