

Town upset over possible killers in high school

LAKE PLACID, N.Y. (AP) — Talib Mustafa Shakir was the boy next door — good grades at Lake Placid High, popular, even dated a local girl — but with a difference.

"Next door," in this case, was the Camelot psychiatric center, which treats troubled youths from around the Northeast. Everybody knew Shakir and the other "Camelot boys" came from troubled backgrounds, but most assumed their problems were limited to childhood traumas or petty thievery.

Then, one day last month, Shakir fled Camelot and returned to his old Washington, D.C., neighborhood. There, police said, he tried to rob a convenience store; a 23-year-old clerk, Tae Shik Yoon, was mortally wounded.

Shakir, 17, was charged with murder — and not for the first time, authorities revealed.

Lake Placid — an idyllic, low-crime resort, twice host of the Winter Olympics — was stunned. Resident Nancy Beattie recalled hearing the news on television with her 16-year-old daughter, Sarah.

"I said, 'My God, Sarah! You know a murderer.'"

As it turned out, Shakir was not the only Camelot boy with death on his record. The *Washington Post* reported that three other boys from that city who were sent to Camelot were involved in homicides. And then a 14-year-old Camelot boy was charged with sodomy and sexual abuse.

The reports sent a chill through Lake Placid, a remote, picture-postcard town nestled in the highest peaks of the Adirondacks where talk this time of year usually revolves around ski conditions.

Camelot and school officials rushed to call a public meeting to assuage fears. Hundreds of residents packed the Lake Placid High School auditorium for what turned out to be a raucous, marathon debate on Camelot's policies.

"How in God's name ... did you take a murderer into your facility?" Susan Holzer asked as hundreds of people around her applauded. "It's not a psychiatric prob-

lem, it's not a behavior problem, it's a murder."

The Rev. Carlos Caguait, executive director of Camelot, this week said the six troubled teen-agers from Washington, D.C., have been returned to the city. A review of the facility's admissions policy is under review.

But citing rules of confidentiality, Caguait has refused to reveal any criminal backgrounds of Camelot boys, including possible records of the half-dozen youths attending Lake Placid High School this semester.

"This incident, I think, is an aberration. We have never had anything like this before," he said.

Camelot — the full name is the Camelot Campus of St. Francis Academy — sits on a wooded hillside just outside of Lake Placid. Established in 1965, the privately run center affiliated with the Episcopal Church has 26 beds, no fences and no guards.

Boys like Shakir who show progress are allowed to take classes at Lake Placid High School. By and large, they fit in; they play sports, appear in plays, take local girls to the prom.

Shakir did well: he made the honor roll once, took up skiing, and made acquaintances who stick up for him to this day.

"The kid wasn't bad. I guess he just did one thing wrong," said 16-year-old Mike Blair, who visited Shakir at the Essex County jail before he was sent back to Washington. Blair said that Shakir was upset that he ever stepped foot in the convenience store.

Shakir walked out of Camelot Oct. 16. The robbery and shooting occurred 10 days later; Yoon died three days after that.

By that time, Shakir was on his way back to Lake Placid. Once back, he got into a fight with another Camelot resident that proved to be his undoing. Officers arriving at the scene were told by residents that Shakir had bragged about his role in the killing.

Under questioning, Shakir confessed, state police said. And officials told the *Post* that Shakir also had been charged in a 1991 murder in Washington, although they

would not say how that case was resolved.

The charges have left some scratching their heads. How could a boy do so well in this bucolic town and then act so differently on the gritty streets of the nation's capital some 300 miles away?

"Maybe it's like the saying 'You can take the boy out of the country but you can't take the country out of the boy,'" said school Superintendent Gerry Blair, who is Mike's father. "Maybe it's the street. I don't know."

Regardless, some Lake Placid residents are fearful. "It's scary. You know here in Lake Placid it's protected. We don't have that," Nancy Beattie said.

"I know from growing up children who had more punishment for fooling with their father's car than these kids are having for murder," Mike Beglin said.

Camelot officials say they are required to allow residents who are deemed psychologically fit for "mainstreaming" to attend the high school. School officials say they cannot legally refuse to accept violent criminals from Camelot and cannot check into their criminal backgrounds.

Camelot's many defenders point to the treatment facility's success rate, which hovers around 70 percent. James Rogers, a lifetime resident of Lake Placid and Camelot board member, said the facility is often the last chance for kids to set a straight course for life.

Camelot psychiatrist John M.W. Nicholson stressed that delinquent boys who come to Camelot have already served their criminal sentence and that Camelot is a place to heal boys with troubled pasts.

"All of us believe absolutely that beneath the defensive emotional scar tissue, there is good in each boy," he said.

That's also a widely held view at Lake Placid High School, where students almost universally support their troubled classmates.

"The sweetest guys I know are from Camelot," student Kate Fish said.

Camps, parks oppose year-round schools

ATLANTA (AP) — The idea of canning summer vacation and keeping kids in school year-round pleases many educators and parents, but it's got amusement parks and campgrounds sweating.

The American Camping Association, a national organization of summer camps, has been on the record for two years with a resolution opposing 12-month schooling, fretting it would reduce organized camping, "a vital component in the development and education of the whole child."

And while the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions has yet to take a formal position, it's concerned enough that it recently hired a North Carolina public relations company to gather research and offer results to other groups that oppose year-round schools.

John Graff, executive director of the Alexandria, Va.-based lobbying organization for 3,700 amusement parks worldwide, said his organization has found that a year-round schedule did not help students and could affect jobs and profits at fun parks.

"It is more expensive and doesn't improve education," Graff said.

But Gary Field, principal of College Park Elementary in suburban Atlanta, the only Georgia school on a year-round schedule, said the benefits outweigh any business lost from a shorter summer vacation.

"If you're going to run your life around summer camp or amusement parks, then there's something wrong," he said.

About 1.5 million students nationwide, from 3.5 percent to 3.7 percent of all students, are in year-round programs, said Charles Ballinger, executive director of the National Council on Year-Round Education, based in

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— Gary Field

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San Diego.

Field and other educators said squeezing summer vacation helps students better retain what they learned in the preceding months.

Alphonse Buccino, dean of the University of Georgia's College of Education, isn't so sure. He said the research is too sketchy. And anyway, he said, the key factor is not whether vacation time is fragmented but how much time students spend in the classroom.

"The key variable is the number of days in the school year," Buccino said. "The Japanese school year is 240 days," compared with 180 days in the United States.

Most year-round schools have the same number of school days and vacation days as traditional schools and simply reconfigure vacation time. Instead of one 12-week break in the summer, with assorted days off for holidays during the year, as at traditional schools, the year-round programs adopt calendars with variations on a six-week summer break and three three-week breaks through the rest of the year.

Graff asserted that some school systems had dropped year-round schedules because they were too expensive and caused too many problems. He cited Los Angeles, where the school board in May scrapped a year-round

schedule for 540 schools, ending a two-year experiment that cost \$8.4 million.

Ballinger said the Los Angeles schools didn't drop year-round schedules for educational reasons.

"If those schools were air-conditioned, we believe they would have stayed on the year-round schedule," he said.

Los Angeles parents were on record complaining that the schedule forced their children to endure hot classrooms during the summer and created child-care problems on winter breaks.

Florida state Rep. Alzo Reddick, D-Orlando, supports the idea of year-round schools, despite the presence of Disneyworld in his home district. He said such big theme parks favor the idea because shorter school breaks would even out the traditional crowded periods.

Reddick said the agricultural calendar that governs the United States' traditional summer-long vacation is an anachronism and makes the nation less competitive. He recently visited Japan and Korea, where he noted children going to school early Saturday mornings.

"If we don't do a better job of educating our people, we will become a third-rate nation," he said.

Keith Green's two children attend College Park Elementary, which has a six-week summer vacation and another two-week break in September. He said his family's trips had not been spoiled by the year-round schedule.

"In fact, my daughter and son attended a summer camp for four weeks," Green said. "The main thing is our children's education. We can always work around it to get to amusement parks."

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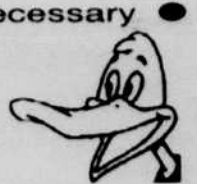


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