

THURSTON HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING

Reaction: Community sends message — 'Let it end here'

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In a quivering voice, a mother read one of the many poems to her daughter as they hugged tightly. "That's really sad, Mom," she said. "I know," the mother replied.

Paying respects to the victims of the shooting was a larger event than just viewing the fence. Some members of the community came out to help comfort and console those affected by the tragedy.

John Brash, a family therapist from Creswell, Ore., came to Eugene to listen to those who needed an ear.

Ways to help

SPRINGFIELD FAITH CENTER:

Those who would like to help with pastoral counseling or assistance may call 726-8449.

THE UNITED WAY OF LAKE COUNTY:

Checks may be made out to the Thurston Healing Fund, and may be sent to The United Way of Lane County, 3171 Gateway Loop, Springfield, Oregon, 97477. For more information, call 741-6000.

WASHINGTON MUTUAL BANK FUND:

An anonymous donor opened an assistance fund for victims. Donations may be made at any Eugene or Springfield branch.

"There are so many people who are mind-numb from this," he said in Thurston Middle School's cafeteria. "These kids are afraid. It's a natural reaction to show signs of post-traumatic stress. Some can't sleep, others have a hard time being outside. I want to be a safety net for them."

Brash, in conjunction with the American Red Cross, said he plans to be available at area churches and schools as long as people need his services.

Groups, including the American Red Cross, reacted

Besides the American Red Cross, other organizations in the Eugene-Springfield area have generated funds, offered counseling support and other services during the weekend, including Looking Glass Station 7, the United Way and local churches.

Jan Becker, another member of the Disaster Action Team, said she was amazed and impressed by the community effort.

"I hope we learn that it takes a village to raise a child," she said. "We all want and need to pull together in this situation."

Brash agreed: "That's the spirit of the community. We're all here together to make people safe."

Friday evening, community members stood and prayed together.

They gathered at a candlelight vigil at Springfield City Hall and sent one message out to all those listening: "Let it end here."

Springfield firefighters distributed royal blue ribbons throughout the area Friday morning to increase awareness about juvenile violence as well as spread the communities' message. Blue ribbons fluttered in the breeze around McKenzie-Willamette Hospital, Sacred Heart Medical Center and along the Thurston High School fence, tied around lamp posts and speed limit signs, car radio antennas and coat lapels.

At the vigil, Springfield City Hall's main fountain was dyed royal blue. Volunteers handed out candles and ribbons to a crowd from all walks of life that spilled out of the parking garage beneath the building where the vigil was held. Despite Thursday's terrible loss, community members somberly but strongly clutched each other in recognition of what they still had while speakers sent out a message of healing.

U.S. Congressman Peter DeFazio spoke about the victims, the heroes and the lessons the community had learned.

"We can't feel their terrible pain, but we can open our hearts ... so they can heal," he said. "We will never be quite the same."

Thurston senior Bennet Smith spoke on behalf of the school's student body.

"To our fellow students, we are so sorry this happened," he said. "Now we need to all come together and give them support. May everybody heal, and may society learn from this tragic event."

After a string of emotional testimonies from clergy, firemen, politicians, doctors and school officials, local pastor Zane Wilson led a candlelighting ceremony and singers of "Amazing Grace" to bring the vigil to a close.

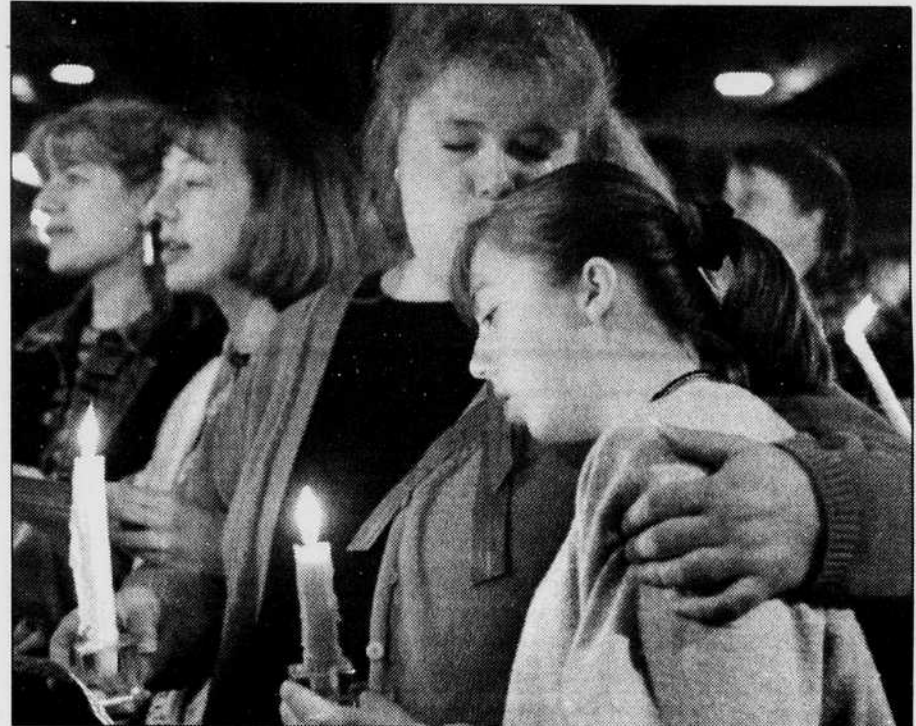
But even after the speakers left the stage and the last chorus was sung, the crowd of families, students and all those affected by the tragedy remained.

And the blue ribbons tied them all together.



LAURA GOSS/Emerald

Alan Zelenka volunteered Friday evening at the candlelight vigil held at Springfield City Hall.



AMANDA COWAN/Emerald

Hundreds of people attended the candlelight vigil Friday night to support each other, cry and pray.

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