

Las Vegas pauses but looks ahead a year after mass shooting

■ Community remembers deadliest shooting in American history

ByTim Dahlberg
The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — A small bouquet of dried flowers was wedged inside the padlock on Gate 5 of the killing ground that was the Route 91 Harvest Festival one recent day, the only visible reminder that it was the site of the worst mass shooting in modern American history. A peek inside the chain-link fence, covered in green sheeting to keep out prying eyes, revealed a sprawling patch of asphalt and little else. Towering above were the gold windows of the Mandalay Bay, where a gambler spent the last minutes of his life in room 32-135 taking the lives of 58 others in a meticulously planned slaughter. Around Las Vegas, there are scattered remembrances of the horrors of that night a year ago. Almost every week, there's another court-ordered release of police body-camera videos that provide flashbacks to the night the gunman turned the fun of the glittering Las Vegas Strip into a nightmare of death and despair. And lawsuits by MGM Resorts International to force survivors to give up their right to sue the casino company that owns Mandalay Bay opened fresh wounds over the summer. But the "Vegas Strong" T-shirts and car stickers have largely been put away. The original handmade white crosses for each victim

have long since been taken away from the "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign to eventually reside in a museum in neighboring Henderson, though some new ones were brought in for the anniversary. There has been no closure, at least officially. Authorities say they will likely never be able to determine what it was that turned a high-limit video poker player into a mass murderer. But in a city that has always looked ahead relentlessly, there's not a lot of time devoted to reflection. Even while pausing to remember the victims on the anniversary of the shooting, Las Vegas moves forward. "A lot of the feeling among people is more, 'Let's move on,'" said Pauline Ng Lee, a community activist and chairwoman of the Nevada Republican Men's Club. "We don't have a lot of long traditions here. You can see it with buildings. Casinos come up, casinos get knocked down. People tend to look forward, not back." Indeed, a look out one side of the high windows of the Mandalay Bay shows the normal sight of dozens of tourists lined up to have their pictures taken in front of the Welcome to Las Vegas sign. A glance to the left draws the eye to the vacated and somber site of the shooting on 15 acres of valuable Las Vegas Strip land that for the foreseeable future simply cannot be used for anything. Owner MGM Resorts International has no plans for the venue and no timeline for making any decisions. Meanwhile, on the other side of the hotel, work goes

on around the clock on a new \$1.9 billion stadium that will be the home of the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders beginning in 2020. It's a reminder that Las Vegas moves on like it always has, through the good times and the bad. It's not that the city has forgotten the shooting or the victims. The white crosses adorned with pictures of those killed were moved recently for the anniversary to the rotunda of the Clark County government building, accompanying a heart-wrenching display of paintings of each person. The victims are portrayed as surviving relatives wanted them to be. One young woman is wearing a Philadelphia Eagles jersey; a man is strumming a guitar. There's a police officer in his uniform, and a man smiling while enjoying a day on the beach. Gathered together for one night to enjoy country music, they are now linked together in eternity. There's a makeshift memorial garden downtown, just around the corner from an adult bookstore, where painted stones and pictures hung in newly planted trees tell stories of lives lost. "Rest easy with my grammy, Beebra," read the inscription on one framed picture of a smiling woman and her young children. On a recent day, a few workers were digging a hole for a 3,000-pound (1,360-kilogram) rock with the victims' initials. A permanent memorial will eventually be located elsewhere — no word from MGM on what will happen to the shooting site itself — but has yet to be planned and is likely years away.



John Locher / AP photo

Angelica Cervantes kneels at her son Erick Silva's grave Saturday, Sept. 29, 2018, in Las Vegas. Silva was one of 58 people killed Oct. 1, 2017, in the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history. Silva was working as a security guard at the Route 91 Harvest Festival and was shot while helping people climb over a barricade to escape the gunfire.

Everybody has a story about how a community came together in the wake of the shooting. Strangers loaded victims in the back of their pickup trucks and rushed them to the hospital. Doctors and nurses rushed in to try to save the wounded, and people — including players from the city's newly minted NHL team — lined up by the hundreds to donate blood. Residents dug deep into their pockets to donate to the victims and their families. It was, former Las Vegas Review-Journal gossip columnist Norm Clarke said, reminiscent of the response to the 1980 MGM Grand fire that killed 85, when there was a community outpouring for those killed. As with the fire, most of the shooting victims were tourists. Only five were from the Las Vegas area. But Las Vegas itself is a city that largely is a collection of immigrants from

around the nation and the world, many with no ties to each other before the shooting seemed to bring them together, at least temporarily. Lee, the community activist, remembers neighbors in gated communities who had done little but nod at each other over the years gathering to talk afterward. And a ceremony at the first Golden Knights hockey game a few days later had anyone who watched shedding tears. Soon, though, "Vegas Strong" largely morphed into "Vegas Born" with the hockey team. Its improbable run into the Stanley Cup Final became more of a story than the way the team helped bring a city together to heal. And through it all, the fun never really stopped on the same Strip where the massacre unfolded. A city that attracts 42 million visitors a year kept the welcome mat out following the shooting as tourists drank, partied and threw the dice inside bustling

casinos. It's taken the Mandalay Bay some time to recover its footing, and tourism numbers are down slightly this year. But Las Vegas' reinvention continues with the new stadium and the resumption of construction at two big hotel projects. And now, as the popular local Twitter feed Vital Vegas asked: How do you commemorate something you don't want to think about? "A lot of people have probably put it out of their minds," said Steve Sisolak, a Clark County commissioner who in the hours after the shooting spearheaded a victim's fund that raised millions and is now running for governor. "The anniversary is going to bring up a lot of feelings, good and bad." It's not closure, but it is one more tribute in a way only Las Vegas can give. Then, as always, the city that never sleeps will move forward once again.

Pendleton couple reflects on Las Vegas shooting a year later

■ An EMT who attended the concert recounts his efforts to help victims

By Kathy Aney
East Oregonian

Images of last year's mass shooting in Las Vegas still live in Kevin and Elaine Anderson's brains. Before the shooting began on Oct. 1, 2017, the Pendleton couple basked in a day of country music at the Route 91 Harvest festival. Suddenly a pop, pop, pop punctured the desert night, sending the Andersons and thousands of others diving for cover. Tucked away on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Resort, the shooter would kill 58 and wound almost 500 people. Kevin, an emergency medical technician and regional communications director for a medical transportation company called American Medical Response, slipped back into a first responder role. In the aftermath of the shooting, he used his 30 years of EMT experience to pull multiple victims to safety. For his bravery, Anderson received the Oregon Health Authority's Medal of

Valor on Friday night at the Oregon EMT Conference in Salem. "We're so incredibly proud of him as an Oregon EMS provider that he was there that day, he knew the consequences of what was going on and he stayed anyway," said Candace Toyama, manager of the Oregon Health Authority's trauma program, which gives the award. As shots flew, Anderson first rescued off-duty police officer Michael Gracia, who lay gravely injured after being shot in the head. Gracia's fiancée, Summer Clyburn, had a bullet in her back. The assault continued rapid-fire. "No one knew where the shooter was," Elaine said. "Kevin picked up Michael and got him the heck out of there." Elaine shepherded Clyburn to safety. Much to Elaine's terror, Kevin turned to rush back in for other victims. "Kevin had an instinct to run towards danger and I wanted to run away from

it," Elaine said. Her husband insists it really wasn't a choice. "For most first responders, it's not an active decision, it's in their DNA," he said. "The 50 to 100 first responders there with me who ran back in had family with them as well." Anderson said ambulances took about 15 minutes to arrive after the shooting ceased. "We were loading people in trunks of cars and running back to find someone else and drag them out," he said. After the shooting, the Andersons joined a Facebook page for survivors. They digested a 400-page FBI report on the 64-year-old shooter Stephen Craig Paddock, detailing everything from how Paddock amassed a cache of semi-automatic weapons to where he parked his car. The pair remains mystified about why someone would shoot hundreds of fellow human beings. In March, Kevin and Elaine faced their fears by returning to Las Vegas to attend another country music concert. Before the concert, they returned to

the site of the shooting. High walls surrounded the perimeter and security guards shooed them away when they tried to peek inside. They instead looked outside the walls at memorials left for loved ones, the gate through which they had escaped and bullet marks in the sidewalk. "The whole intent of going there was to take back that town," Kevin said. "It was important to us to retrace our steps and go to another live show." The concert was indoors, but the festive atmosphere was similar to the previous concert. The couple stayed near the exit just in case. As they listened to Kenny Chesney perform, they relaxed and reclaimed a little peace. One demon had been slain. They weren't the only

survivors on a quest to take back the city they had loved. Many of them, including Kevin, wore shirts identifying themselves as survivors. Whenever the couple came across other survivors, the reaction was visceral. "There was a lot of tears. A lot of hugs," Kevin said. "It was very emotional for people." The Andersons learned that Michael Gracia and his fiancée were also in Vegas that weekend. The couples had stayed in touch since the night Kevin carried Michael to safety. Gracia, who recently returned to work at the Ontario (California) Police Department, spent months relearning how to speak. He and his fiancée returned to Vegas that weekend in March to participate in a

5-kilometer run. They met the Andersons for lunch. "It was so beautiful," Elaine said. "We spent two hours talking. It was the first time we'd been together since the shooting." "It was healing for all of us," Kevin said. The Andersons will travel to California in May to attend the wedding of Gracia and Clyburn. During the awards banquet on Friday, Gracia spoke from a video, thanking Kevin for saving his life. Kevin, though touched by the video, shrugged off the notion that he is some kind of hero. "I have been lucky in my career to be surrounded by heroes," he said. "It's difficult to define yourself in those terms when you look up to so many folks who do this every day."

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