

The Tuscaloosa News

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DEATH TOLL AT 28 IN CONN. RAMPAGE

Man kills mother at home, then kills 27, self at elementary school; 20 children dead

By John Christoffersen
The Associated Press

NEWTOWN, CONN. | A man killed his mother at their home and then opened fire Friday inside an elementary school, massacring 26 people, including 20 children, as youngsters covered in fear to the sound of gunshots reverberating through the building and screams echoing over the intercom.

The 20-year-old killer, carrying at least two handguns, committed suicide at the school, bringing the death toll to 28, authorities said.

The rampage, coming less than two weeks before Christmas, was the nation's second-deadliest school shooting, exceeded only by the Virginia Tech massacre that claimed 33 lives in 2007.

"Our hearts are broken today," a tearful President Barack Obama said at the White House. He called for "meaningful action" to prevent such shootings, saying, "As a country, we have been through this too many times."

Police shed no light on the motive for the attack. The gunman, Adam Lanza, was believed to suffer from a personality disorder and lived with his mother, said a law enforcement official who was briefed on the investigation but was not authorized to discuss it.

Panicked parents looking for their children raced to Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, a prosperous New England community of about 27,000 people 60 miles northeast of New York City. Police told youngsters at the kindergarten-through-fourth-grade school to close their eyes as they were led from the building so that they wouldn't see the blood and broken glass.

Schoolchildren — some crying, others looking frightened — were escorted through a parking lot in a line, hands on each other's shoulders.

Law enforcement officials speaking on condition of anonymity said that Lanza killed his mother, Nancy Lanza, then drove to the school in her car with at least three guns, including a high-powered rifle that he apparently left in the back of the vehicle, and shot into two classrooms around 9:30 a.m.

A custodian ran through the halls, warning of a gunman on the loose, and someone switched on the intercom, alerting people in the building to the attack — and perhaps saving many lives — by letting them hear the hysteria going on in the school office, a teacher said. Teachers locked their doors and ordered children to huddle in a corner or hide in closets as shots echoed through the building.

Authorities gave no details on exactly how the attack unfolded, but police radio traffic indicated the shooting lasted only a few minutes. State police Lt. Paul Vance said officers arrived instantaneously, immediately entered the school, searched it completely and found Lanza dead.

In addition to the 20 children, six adults were killed at the school; the principal was believed to be among the dead. A woman who worked at Sandy Hook Elementary was wounded.

A law enforcement official speaking on condition of anonymity said investigators believe Lanza attended the school several years ago but appeared to have no recent connection to the school.

SEE SHOOTING | 4A



Parents leave a staging area after being reunited with their children following a shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., on Friday. By late Friday, the death toll was at 28, including the shooter and his mother, who was killed at her home, and 20 children at the school.

PHOTOS | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



President Barack Obama pauses as he talks about the Connecticut elementary school shooting Friday in the White House briefing room in Washington. "Our hearts are broken today," the president said in an emotional address.

Former UA softball player had family in nearby school

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

The University of Alabama softball program was touched, indirectly, by Friday's tragic elementary school shooting in Newtown, Conn., where former UA player Cassie Reilly-Boccia had two cousins in a nearby school.

Both Dillon Diaspro, a fourth-grader, and his sister, Samantha, a preschooler, were in a different school located across the street from Sandy Hook Elementary, where the shooting took place. Neither was harmed.

Reilly-Boccia, a senior Academic All-American on Alabama's 2012 national championship team, got a call from her mother Friday morning about the shooting.

"I turned on the news right away,"

SEE SOFTBALL | 4A

Local officials ask the question: Could it happen here?

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

TUSCALOOSA | Could it happen here?

That was a lingering question for many parents and relatives of school-aged children across Tuscaloosa County as news of the school shooting massacre in Newtown, Conn., spread across the nation on Friday.

It also was a question that hit the

minds of local law enforcement and elected officials, many of whom reacted not only as representatives and protectors, but as parents and relatives themselves.

"As a parent and a mayor, it absolutely sparks a conversation," said Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox, himself the father of an elementary school-aged child. "I think we need to see exactly what happened in Newtown and draw from those experi-

ences to make our area safer.

"There may be nothing you can do to 100 percent prevent a tragedy like this, but that doesn't mean you don't look at the situation to see what — if anything — could be done."

Conversations like this are expected in the city and county school systems, where numerous safeguards and security measures already are in place for all elementary, middle and

SEE LOCAL | 4A

Fight ends basketball game; pepper spray disperses crowd

By Andrew Carroll
and Jason Morton
Sports Writer and Staff Writer

TUSCALOOSA | A sold-out, marquee match-up between Central and Paul W. Bryant high schools ended abruptly Friday night when police used pepper spray to break up a fight.

Tuscaloosa police were searching for a suspect late Friday night and charges, if any, are pending the outcome of the investigation.

The basketball game will resume at 4 p.m. today without spectators, officials said.

The altercation that halted the game began in the stands between a student

and a non-student, according to witnesses.

"One man, he got up and started talking ...," said witness and Central High School student William Channell, 15, "and all you saw was another person, he looked like he was in ninth grade, he just came over and hit the dude while he was talking."

"I couldn't see any more after that because people started running out."

Sgt. Brent Blankley, spokesman for the Tuscaloosa Police Department, said officers at the game radioed dispatch at about 8:30 p.m. to notify other officers that a fight had broken out during the basketball game.

SEE FIGHT | 4A

Marvin Lucas, a member of the Tuscaloosa City Board of Education, carries a Paul W. Bryant High School cheerleader through the crowd and out of Central High School on Friday.



STAFF PHOTO | MICHELLE LEPIANKA CARTER

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