

Families ask for Detroit's help in W . Va . killings

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Twice a day, before she wakes her children and after she puts them to bed, Subrina Poston of Huntington, **W . Va .**, slips into the bedroom of her late daughter.

It looks exactly how it did when Megan, 16, died **in** May. Her purple robe hangs over a dresser mirror, her flip-flops are clumped together and the shorts and T-shirt she always slept **in** are still where she left them under a nightstand.

"It took a lot from me," said Poston, 38. "It took her senior year, took her not graduating, took her not having a driver's license, took her not getting a job, not getting married and having children.

"Most of all, it took my best friend."

Seven months later, Poston is no closer to learning why her eldest child was taken away. She was one of four teens fatally shot after a high school prom **in** the Appalachian community.

The police immediately speculated that the shootings were connected to an infestation of drug dealers from Detroit, but despite the assertion, they still haven't developed enough evidence to charge anyone.

The lack of an arrest, or information about the investigation by tight-lipped police, has frustrated the **families** of the four victims.

"I just wish they could make an arrest, convict someone and it would be over," said Theresa Dillon, whose 17-year-old son, Michael, was among the victims.

The parents plan to visit Detroit **in** several months to scout a location **for** a billboard asking **for help in** solving the crime. The roadside banner would be similar to four **in** Huntington.

What they seek, above all else, is closure.

Inside her daughter's bedroom, Poston tells her firstborn that she loves her, misses her and wishes she could have done more to protect her.

"Everyone has moved on but me," she said. "I don't want to move on. I don't want to move on without my baby."

Little progress

After Poston dropped off her daughter **for** a high school prom **in** May, she circled the parking lot a second time to savor how radiant Megan looked **in** her yellow and red gown.

Nine hours later, the teen was dead. The gown, which she'd changed out of after the prom, was on the ground next to her.

Poston, Dillon, Eddrick Clark, 18, and Donte Ward, 19, were fatally shot outside Ward's apartment house at 4:30 a.m. Police said Ward was the apparent target of the attack while the other three were killed to ensure their silence.

Huntington police quickly focused on drug dealers from Detroit.

"If you're from Detroit, you're a suspect," Capt. Steve Hall said at the time.

The **families**' hopes of catching the killer were buoyed two weeks later when police arrested a Detroit woman, Cherylethia Holmes, 24, who was living near Ward at the time of the murders.

An FBI agent testified at Holmes' bond hearing that she was a drug dealer who wanted acquaintances from Detroit to kill Ward because of a drug debt.

But Holmes, who was arrested on unrelated counts, has not been charged **in** the murders. On Dec. 5, she pleaded guilty **in** U.S. District Court to drug and weapon charges. She will be sentenced Feb. 27.

Huntington police, who originally described Holmes as the focus of their investigation, declined to discuss her last week.

Lt. Mike Albers said the police are making progress as the probe lurches from one group of informants to another. But the department still doesn't have enough information to make an arrest.

"We have nothing concrete at this time," he said.

Albers said he didn't know how much longer the investigation will take.

While Detroit drug dealers hover like unindicted co-conspirators over the murder case, their connection to the Huntington drug trade remains strong, Albers said.

After the murders, a joint law enforcement task force launched a series of drug raids **in** Huntington. Nearly every one yields residents of Detroit, police said. The biggest was Oct. 14, when seven of the 19 people arrested were from the Motor City.

Detroit also remains a steady supplier of crack cocaine to other Midwest outposts from Mansfield, Ohio, to Lexington, Ky., to Bloomington, Ind., according to law enforcement officials.

Little closure

Seven months after the slayings, the victims' **families** remain haunted.

They've met with the mayor and police several times about the investigation. But there's little the police will say because they want to keep the information confidential.

So the parents remain **in** the dark about why their children were at the apartment building **in** the wee hours of a Sunday morning, and what led to the shootings. They don't know whether the villain is from Detroit, or closer to home.

"They tell us the same thing 50 different ways: 'We would like to tell you but we can't,'" said Poston, the mother of Megan.

But the parents aren't critical of police, and still feel they're on the right trail by looking to Detroit.

The **families** have tried to **help** by starting a reward fund that now amounts to \$43,000. They've raised donations by soliciting local businesses and selling baby-blue rubber bracelets with the names of the victims.

Moving on with their lives isn't possible yet, they said. Everything reminds them of their loss: movies, songs, TV shows, the news. One relative stopped watching her favorite show, "CSI," because the shootings and autopsies were too painful to view.

Lue Alice Garrett, the grandmother of Clark, had spent every Thanksgiving and Christmas with him. She continued the tradition this year, visiting his gravesite four times on Dec. 25.

"I can't believe my grandson is laying there," she said about the grave, which is decorated with flowers and cards. "It's hard to deal with. His life was just getting started."

Clark was only 5 feet 6 inches tall but good enough at basketball to make the high school team. He was crazy about his Nike Air Jordans, sneakers named after his hoops hero, Michael Jordan.

The buyer of those \$160 sneakers was his grandmother. Relatives told her she was spoiling the child but she didn't pay any heed.

"It's going to be a long time to get over it," she said. "It's hard to relate because we don't know who did it."

Dillon and Poston, the mothers of the two teens who attended the prom together, didn't know each other before the murders. They have since become friends by talking weekly.

They chat about their lives, how they're coping, what may have happened the night of the shootings and how they can raise more money.

Dillon, 41, thinks about her son when she drives past a bunch of high school kids joking around with their baggy pants hanging low on their waists. It reminds her that he would have graduated

high school this year and begun studying to be a diesel mechanic like his uncle.

She originally hoped an arrest would relieve the pain but has learned from counselors that the criminal justice system offers little remedy **for** grief.

"I don't think it will ever get easier," she said.

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