

Violence , drugs : ' Just another day ' - 4 bodies found hardly surprises northwest Detroit community

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DETROIT -- Deflated Mylar balloons dangle lifelessly from a utility pole a few feet above a collection of grimy teddy bears and other tattered stuffed animals that share space with discarded whiskey bottles and soggy trash.

A grubby gray T-shirt bearing photographs of a young man and the message "R.I.P. Darric, 8/29/86 - 6/13/05" is held fast to the pole by thick blue yarn, giving a name and a face to the long-neglected memorial.

Death permeates this northwest Detroit community of boarded-up houses and litter-strewn empty lots. The discovery this month of four bodies buried in a field of overgrown brush and behind an abandoned house on Mansfield near Elmira was hardly a surprise, neighbors said.

" **Just another day** in the neighborhood," shrugged Greg Hall, 46, who lives across the street from the lot where two of the bodies were found March 15. "People get killed, and it **just** kind of rolls off your back. What can you do?"

Amid the decay and **violence** of the neighborhood, people like Hall struggle to raise children and try to enjoy normal lives. Some of the homes, including Hall's, are well-kept, and their lawns are free of the litter that's scattered everywhere else.

"It's hard trying to bring your kids up the right way in all this mess," said Hall, who described himself as a recovering crack addict who has been **drug** -free for six years. "You've got to get 'old-school' on them; you've got to be strict. You can't let them go out whenever they want to. They don't like it, but that's how it is -- you've got to keep a real close eye on what they're doing all the time."

Police responded to an anonymous tipster who called the Project Safe Neighborhoods hot line to report there were bodies buried in a lot on Mansfield, near Greenfield and Plymouth Road. The lot, which was thick with underbrush before crews bulldozed it last week during the search for bodies, was used as a dumping ground for old tires and other junk, neighbors said.

Two decomposed bodies were found in the field March 14; one was buried in a shallow grave, and **another** was found underneath a mattress. The skeletal remains of two more bodies, also buried in shallow graves, were discovered the next **day** behind an abandoned house that abuts the field, police said.

Police identified two of the victims as Tommie Kirkland and DeAngelo Patton, both 21. They both suffered from gunshot wounds, although the official cause of death has yet to be determined.

Forensic investigators are still trying to identify the other two bodies. The Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office has enlisted an anthropologist to help identify the skeletal remains.

"This is still an open investigation, so at this point I don't want to say too much about the case," Assistant Chief Robert Dunlop said.

Hall said he knew one of the victims for several years, although he would not identify him by name.

"He grew up in foster care, but he never would listen to his foster mother, and he wound up on the streets selling **drugs** with the rest of them," Hall said. "He thought he was going to make some fast money, but they never do. They make about enough to buy something to drink and some weed -- maybe \$30 bucks a **day** . Life should be worth more than \$30 bucks a **day** , man."

Hall, who wore a red sweat shirt bearing the logo of the Detroit Area Convention of Narcotics Anonymous, said his kids witnessed his struggle with addiction: "Hopefully, since they've seen it all up close, they'll know enough not to get involved in that stuff."

Johnnie Carr, 73, and her son, Derrick Adkins, 51, have lived in a brick home on Mansfield, down the street from where the bodies were found, for 39 years. **Drug** activity in the neighborhood started getting really bad about 10 years ago, Carr said.

Adkins said he's not surprised by the **drugs** and **violence** on his block. He said his house occasionally gets hit by a stray bullet.

"After you get used to something so long, the shock wears off," he said. "It's becoming a norm, like it's nothing."

He said there is always some type of **drug** activity on the street, and he said the same crew has been working the area for years.

Although **violence** is normal in the neighborhood, Carr said she was upset about the discovery of the four bodies so close to home. She said she was considering spending some time out of town visiting relatives so she can get away from the neighborhood.

Darryl McKinney, 32, said he has lived in the area his whole life. He was philosophical about the discovery: "If you do bad things, bad things come back on you," he said.

When asked to describe what it's like trying to survive in his neighborhood, McKinney shrugged.

"Look around you: It is what it is," he said. "It's the jungle, and we're living in it."

Caption: A neighbor says there is always some type of **drug** activity and **violence** on the streets in northwest Detroit. A police officer and a dog search a field on Mansfield. Two bodies have been identified, but forensic investigators are still trying to identify two others. The Wayne Medical Examiner's Office has enlisted an anthropologist to help identify the remains. An old memorial decays near Mansfield and Elmira, near where the bodies were buried in the lot of an abandoned home. Derrick Adkins, 51, says he's not surprised by the **drugs** and **violence** on his block in northwest Detroit, where four bodies were found March 14-15. "After you get used to something so long the shock wears off," he says. "It's becoming a norm, like it's nothing."

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