

In push to stop violence, community groups focus on friends, family of potential shooters



- AMBER ARNOLD -- State Journal

Police investigate the scene of a reported shooting at the BP gas station Tuesday afternoon on Verona Road in Madison. There were about 20 police vehicles around the scene shortly after the shots were reported about 6:30 p.m.

- M.P. KING -- State Journal

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As Madison authorities continue their investigation into a string of fatal shootings across the area,

community leaders are also at work reaching out to members of two local factions in a grassroots effort to put the brakes on a feud that has claimed three lives over the past month.

Officials are also trying to get the attention of those close to the people involved — particularly parents, grandparents and friends — encouraging them to help authorities find those responsible for the shootings, and hoping they could discourage future violence.

“We have to somehow reach out to these young men who are committing these crimes,” said Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County. “Marches are not going to do it. Public service announcements are not going to do it. It’s going to take sitting down face to face and also offering some alternatives to these young men.”

The series of homicides started early April 19, when Martez Moore, 30, of Madison, was shot after a disturbance in the parking lot of a Far West Side bar.

Three weeks later, Madison Police Chief Mike Koval said Darius Haynes, 38, of Madison, was “summarily executed” Tuesday as he sat in a car at a Verona Road gas station. The next day, Elijah James Washington III, 28, also of Madison, was fatally shot at a gas station in the town of Madison.

The suspect in the third shooting, Kortney D. Moore, 28, of Madison, is the brother of the victim in the first.

The kind of deadly, retaliatory shootings seen in the past week have long been a problem in larger cities, but Koval said they are unprecedented in Madison.

Mayor Paul Soglin said at a press conference Saturday this is “perhaps the most violent year in the history of the city.” A main concern in the two recent killings in the city is the lack of witness cooperation, Soglin said.

It’s up to those with information to share what they know with law enforcement to keep the community safe, Soglin said, adding that those who don’t share needed information “become complicit with what is being done.”

Police have avoided describing the groups involved as gangs, but Koval has said the shootings have “an element of keeping score.”

As police search for the killers, members of local community groups say they are trying disrupt the feud that has led to the shootings. Anthony Cooper, director of re-entry services for the Nehemiah Center for Urban Leadership Development, said he and others are working with members of the warring groups to mediate their conflict, though Cooper shied away from discussing details.

Cooper said community groups are also talking with people who might know more about the shootings, encouraging them to “be honest with the police, so we can stop the violence.”

Madison police spokesman Joel DeSpain said he wasn't aware of that effort, but "anything that community leaders can do to mitigate the situation so we don't have additional people getting killed is good." Police are trying "to get people to calm down," he said. "We'd be all for community members doing the same."

Ald. Samba Baldeh, 17th District, echoed that sentiment at Saturday's press conference, saying citizens should reach out to police and community leaders when they see unsafe things going on so that problems can be worked out before people get killed.

"We are all in this together," Baldeh said. "We collectively have to make this city better. ... We have to see ourselves as our brother's keepers."

More official efforts from local government and nonprofit organizations have focused on the parents and grandparents of people involved in gangs and shootings, such as a recent ["Stop the Violence"](#) video made by community leaders and the city of Madison.

"It's going to take a comprehensive effort and efforts by leaders and mothers and fathers in our neighborhoods to address this," Deputy Mayor Enis Ragland said.

Family members often know when young people have started getting involved in gangs and guns, said Timothy Maymon, who runs a local organization that uses sports to keep kids out of trouble. And as some gang members have gotten bolder about posting photos of weapons on social media, Maymon said, many of their peers are also well aware of their ties.

He encouraged anyone who knows the people involved in shootings to take a more active role in discouraging them from resorting to gun violence. "We've got to get them to cease fire."

Maymon's wife, LaTanya Maymon, at a Saturday morning prayer service outside the BP gas station at 4501 Verona Road where Haynes was killed, said she wants to see the community cooperate with police officers, but she understands that change has to come from the community itself.

She said the young boys who think their lives don't mean anything need to know that they matter. "They need to know that greater is coming," she said. "You are worth it. Don't give up."

Officials said it's hard to know if this spurt of violence is over, or if another cycle of shootings and

retaliation might break out.

Johnson said he is concerned that with summer on the way the conflicts could get worse.

As he spoke with a reporter by telephone while walking through East Towne Mall last week, Maymon ran into his niece, a high school student. He peppered her with questions about the possibility some of her classmates could be involved in gun violence.

“I don’t know what else to do but keep talking to the kids, keep talking to the parents,” he said. “It’s important that you stress to them, ‘You need to put your guns away.’”

State Journal reporters Ed Treleven and Amanda Finn contributed to this report.