



With news of the Virginia Tech shootings unfolding on the televisions, Gabriel Averill, a chef at the Nerv Restaurant in Blacksburg, finds comfort with his friend Christyne Fitzgerald. Photos by STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS | The Roanoke Times

# This year has seen 'so much'

Just months after a shooting left two dead, the community is again keeping victims in its thoughts and prayers.



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**Stephanie Rogol**  
Owner, Sharkey's restaurant

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BLACKSBURG — In the wake of the worst school massacre in U.S. history, many businesses in this normally calm college town were closed.

Sharkey's bar and restaurant was not. "I just think it's important for people to get together and talk to each other," owner Stephanie Rogol said in explaining her decision to open. "It's a time when people just need each other. It's, it's devastating."

Even after the morning's loudspeaker alerts — warning people to seek shelter indoors — no longer echoed from the Virginia Tech campus through downtown, few people were out.

Those who were said they could not believe what had happened.

Several cited the August incident in which authorities allege that escaped inmate William Morva shot and killed a security guard and a sheriff's deputy, which prompted Tech to cancel its first day of fall classes, as the only remotely comparable event they could recall. But dozens more died this time.

Grace McConahay of Blacksburg was walking down Main Street on her way to pick up her 8-year-old daughter from school.

"I don't know what to tell her," McConahay said. She added: "I feel so bad for the families. My thoughts and prayers are with them and the community."

Larry Bechtel said he just kept looking at the faces of drivers in cars passing by.

"They were impassive, but I know that everybody I see is going through the same thing," trying to come to terms with the tragedy, he said.

Multiple vigils were being set up in memory of the more than 30 victims.

"It's a hell of a way to end my time living in Blacksburg after nine years," said Shannon Turner, a Tech graduate student who was organizing a candlelight vigil Monday night at Henderson Lawn on Tech's campus.

Numerous public officials, including President Bush, offered condolences to the victims' families and the community.

Mayor Ron Rordam declined to comment on the shootings, except to say the town would assist Tech in any way possible.

Councilman Al Leighton, a former Tech professor, said of the carnage: "It doesn't seem like people could be that deranged. But we're no longer a small town or a small campus."

Montgomery County schools, which were on lockdown Monday, were to be closed today.

Superintendent Tiffany Anderson issued a statement saying, "While we are still getting reports in regard to the number of families impacted directly across the district, we do believe at this time that there are many families in our community who may have suffered a loss as a result of today's incident."

A collaborative event between several religious organizations on campus was being set up for Wednesday. Its location and time were to be determined.

Seth Terrell, Virginia Tech campus pastor at Blacksburg Church of Christ, said, "I guess if I could tell everyone anything it's just to continue to pray and just pray that people can maybe be brought closer to God in the midst of this tragedy. But, really, I'm just at a loss for words."

At Sharkey's, Rogol called the shootings "Blacksburg's 9/11" and said she would donate the proceeds from Monday and tonight to whatever fund is set up for the victims.

Down the bar, Laura Dunning sat watching a news update announcing still more casualties as a screen behind her showed the U.S. Senate observing a moment of silence for the victims.

"Just so much has gone on this year," she said, summing up the sentiments of many in a town unused to the type of high-profile tragedies it has now seen twice in less than a year.

Staff writers Tonia Moxley and Jared Turner contributed to this report.



People pray during a service for Virginia Tech students at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Blacksburg.

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