



Photo by Todd Luck

Hundreds gathered at Corpening Plaza on Thursday, June 16 to remember the victims of the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida.

Local LGBT community and allies mourn Orlando victims

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Hundreds filled Corpening Plaza Thursday evening June 16, evening during a vigil held by Pride Winston-Salem for the victims of the Orlando shooting.

On June 12, the worst mass shooting in the country's recent history took place at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. A gunman armed with an assault rifle and pistol opened fire on a crowd of 300 during the club's Latin night, killing 49 and wounding more than 50.

The shooter, who was killed by police, claimed allegiance to the Islamic State in 911 calls during a standoff with authorities, though investigators have found no links between him and ISIS.

The media has been referring to Pulse and other gay nightclubs as a sanctuary for those in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. During the vigil, Pride Winston-Salem President Jerry Morin said he agreed with that description.

"It's a sanctuary for us to go, have fun, dance, be with our friends without judgment or fear of violence," he said. "For a lot of people, that's been violated. It will take some time to get that back, but we can't let that deter us."

Speakers at the vigil also called for action.

Corey Hodges, a former Pride board member, applauded senators who walked out during the moment of silence in Congress for the Orlando shooting. The Democratic senators were protesting lack of legislative action on guns after numerous mass shootings. After a nearly 15-hour filibuster, Republican Senate leadership agreed to hold votes on universal background checks and banning those on the terrorist watch list from buying guns. These measures did not pass Monday.

Hodges also talked about the outpouring of online support, with hashtags like #keepkissing, which refers to the shooter's father saying that his son was upset when he saw two men kissing. Hodges told those in the LGBT community to not hide who they are and continue to "queer the space," referring to a sermon by Rev. Roger Hayes, the openly gay pastor of Church of the Holy Spirit Fellowship.

"I implore you to keep kissing, queer this space and never be silent," said Hodges.

Hodges said while there's currently no gay bar or club in Winston-Salem, after Club Snap recently closed, the local LGBT community finds sanctuary in groups like Pride, which holds a festival and parade in October, faith groups and other organizations.

One of those organiza-

tions is Northstar LGBT Community Center, located on Burke Street. Teresa Carter, who founded it in 2013, said the center is using grief counselors to help people deal with the tragedy. She said the center has had calls from people who were so shaken by the shooting they were thinking of suicide. It's also had people who've called wanting to volunteer and help however they can.

"We've fought many things in the last 20 years, and this is just another thing we're going to fight together," she said.

Also among the speakers was Interfaith Winston-Salem Chair Drea Parker and Devonte Jackson, a transgender man. Rev. Maria Teresa, an associate pastor at Wentz Memorial United Church of Christ, read a message in both English and Spanish at the end. She then read the names of all 49 victims killed in the Pulse shooting as Hodges rang a bell for each one. The crowd of about 500 stood silently and held candles as each name was read, some crying and embracing each other as they tried to deal with the tragedy.

Another vigil was held Sunday at Merschel Plaza, along Fourth Street in downtown Winston-Salem. That vigil was hosted by the North Star LGBT Community Center.



Photo by Todd Luck

A few of the guns collected at the Firearms Safe Surrender are shown.

Police gather unwanted guns from the public

BY TODD LUCK
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Amidst a spike in homicides, the Winston-Salem Police Department (WSPD) collected unwanted guns and ammo on Saturday, June 18, in the parking lot of Waughtown Baptist Church.

The Firearms Safe Surrender let gun owners turn in firearms and ammo to the police with no questions asked. The guns and ammo will be destroyed, though some ammo may be used for testing by the department. Firearms are checked before they're disposed of to make sure they aren't stolen and haven't been used in a crime.

Those wanting to dispose of their guns pulled up in their vehicles and let officers remove the weapons. Lt. Katie Paterson said they had three people waiting for them right when the event started at 9 a.m.

"The point is to offer an opportunity to folks who may have guns or ammunition in their home, maybe they have small children and don't want the guns present anymore, or maybe

they've had them and just haven't known how to get rid of them," said Paterson. "It gives them a chance to safely get rid of them."

By the time it ended at 1 p.m., officers had collected three handguns, three shotguns, two BB guns, a black powder pistol and hundreds of rounds of ammo. This is far less than what police collected in the two city-funded gun buybacks held in 2014. The buybacks offered between \$100-\$175 per weapon.

Cpl. Brian Ashley, who is with the firearms training unit, said they were able to fill the back of a van with collected weapons during the buybacks.

"It was a very big turnout," he said.

Paterson said that the WSPD opted for a safe surrender event this time because it could be organized quicker as a response to the higher than usual homicides the city is having this year. In the month it took to plan the event, that number has climbed higher. As of Friday, there have been 14 homicides, as opposed to six at this time last year. The event also

comes a week after the worst mass shooting in recent United States history at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida.

Paterson said the WSPD regularly gets calls to dispose of firearms. She said the best way to dispose of guns and ammo is to call the WSPD so a patrol officer can pick them up, or bring them by police headquarters at 725 N. Cherry St.

Assistant Police Chief Wilson Weaver said that any weapon the police can get off the street is a good thing.

"Any weapons that we're able to get off the street and safely dispose of are weapons we don't have to be concerned about being utilized in a crime or a child getting a hold of," said Weaver.

Weaver said that the safe surrender event is just one part of WSPD's response to the spike in violence. He said officers are making appeals to the community for information on violent crimes. He said officers also try to be out and visible in the community as much as possible.

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- Keep your system updated
- Don't Hack your own device
- Always log out of banking and shopping sites
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