

Resident reflects on Santa Monica shooting

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 20 June 2013 14:36 -



The recent shooting on a college campus in Santa Monica, CA, that left five people dead hit close to home for one Gothenburg resident.

Local resident Robert Wehnes, club house manager at Wild Horse Golf Club, was born and raised in Santa Monica which he still considers his hometown.

Wehnes was born in Santa Monica in 1969 and graduated from Santa Monica High School in 1987.

The alleged shooter, John Zawahare, attended the same high school and Santa Monica College where the shooting occurred on June 7.

Wehnes took classes at the college for two years.

As the tragedy unfolded on television and Facebook, Wehnes said it was a sad day to see the portrayal in an area familiar to him, particularly Santa Monica College where Zawahare allegedly killed people after carjacking a vehicle to get there.

“Knowing that I still have family and friends in the area, I was wondering if everyone was okay,” he said.

Fortunately they were.

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His sister, Edie Patton, told him: “Insane is what happened.”

Wehnes’ friend, Marcus Chan said the situation was like the Los Angeles riots happening all over again.

After Los Angeles police were videotaped beating Rodney King and were later acquitted in 1992, violent riots spread through the city.

Marcus told Wehnes the area was in “lock down” and posted pictures on Facebook of police helicopters hovering above his home.

On that day, another friend drove to pick up his sons from school.

The drive, that usually takes about 15 minutes, lasted more than an hour because of blocked streets.

Although Wehnes did not know the shooter or his family, places and things involved in the tragedy brought back memories.

He said Zawahare shot into a city commuter bus, hitting two people.

“This could have been not only my family, but my friends or a friend of a friend,” Wehnes said. “Thank God it wasn’t.”

Vigils for the victims have been ongoing.

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On a recent trip to California to see relatives who still live there, Wehnes had lunch in Santa Monica with friends he grew up with and to see what the city looked like since he hadn't returned for 14 years.

"Way too much money and way too many people for me now," Wehnes said.

Still, he said Santa Monica remains a great place to visit.

Wehnes added that the tragedy has triggered the importance of family and friends.

"Don't forget to say 'I love you' to your friends and family as this could happen to any one at any time and any where," he said.

Wehnes moved from West Los Angeles to Gothenburg in 1998 to be closer to family. His mother, Kay, lives at Johnson Lake, and his grandparents—Bill and Beulah Healey, who have since died—started Gothenburg Feed Products.

A job opportunity at the golf club was also part of his decision to move to the area.

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