

Unity Walk: Community shows support for ending gang violence



Some marchers chanted while others walked silently during the April 17 Unity Walk from the Santa Paula Police Memorial to Veterans Memorial Park.



A relative of Norma Elizalde, a 39-year-old mother of two who was shot and killed by a stray bullet while in the carport of the High Street home March 29, holds yellow roses while listening to speakers at the Unity Walk.



Some marchers carried signs to urge justice for those killed in recent homicides in Santa Paula on the Unity Walk, attended by about 175 people including Police Chief Steve McLean (right).

By Peggy Kelly
Santa Paula Times

An estimated 175 people gathered on Holy Thursday to show they believe in unity and want the gang violence that has plagued Santa Paula over the past year to stop.

The UnityWalk, a joint effort of the Santa Paula Police Officers Association and Santa Paula Ministerial Association, was held April 17.

Participants, some carrying signs asking for justice for murder victim 21-year-old Ashley Moran, found dead in Obregon Park March 15, and supporters of Norma Elizalde, 39, killed by a stray bullet fired during an alleged daytime gang altercation March 29 near her High Street home, met at the Santa Paula Police Memorial.

Sgt. Jimmy Fogata and the Rev. Jenny Crosswhite organized the UnityWalk suggested by Citrus Classic Balloon Festival Founder Carla Edwards.

"I'm really pleased to see so many concerned citizens here," said Edwards.

Sandy Thompson said she had taken part in a similar but smaller march several weeks ago and believes, "We should have a march monthly" to show peace is sought in Santa Paula.

Holly Doering held yellow roses, "My favorite flowers," that she hoped to give to family members who lost a love one to violence.

Deacon Al Guilin told the crowd, "Five churches within the hour will be having services," cumulating in Easter Day celebrations.

Much as Pontius Pilot washed his hands after the death of Jesus to symbolically erase his part in His crucifixion Guilin said people must not "wash their hands of responsibility," for what they can do to help quell the local violence.

Unity Marchers traveled on the Bike Trail from the SPPD Memorial to 8th Street where they turned to continue the walk on East Main Street to Mill Street and on to Veterans Memorial Park.

At the park candles waited at a table for lighting as Xavier "Big X" Montes played the harp.

SPPD Cadet Martha Reynolds-Brown and Citizens Patrol Samantha Frady and Richard Macias were among those

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Multiple unlocked vehicles targeted for burglaries

By Peggy Kelly
Santa Paula Times

Multiple thefts from vehicles hit a usually quiet neighborhood where last week numerous residents lost valuables from unlocked vehicles.

According to Santa Paula Police Sgt. Jeremy Watson, police received "multiple reports of thefts from vehicles," Thursday, April 17.

The reports were in the areas of Teague and Glade drives, north of Santa Paula Street between Bradley Street and McKeveett Heights.

Watson said the victims reported "such items as wallets, packages, miscellaneous items, and in one instance, a generator," stolen from a carport near a vehicle that was burglarized, were taken.

"In most instances," noted Watson, "the reporting party told Officer's that the items were taken from their unlocked vehicles."

The Santa Paula Police Department would like to remind citizens to lock their vehicles and take out or secure items of value.

Said Watson, "Most of us become complacent because we live in a quiet neighborhood void of criminal activity. Most thefts are considered 'crimes of opportunity,'" and thieves will often target quiet neighborhoods for that reason.

Watson said police recommend residents install motion detector floodlights in the driveways of residences in poorly lit neighborhoods.

"It is also recommended that citizens promptly report all suspicious activity to the police," he added, "no matter how minor they believe it is."

Lt. Ishmael Cordero said residents must make sure to lock their vehicle doors and to avoid leaving valuables in their vehicles, even if locked.

"It's easy for someone to come by and try your car door... if it opens they're in. Often when hitting multiple vehicles," only those vehicles left unlocked are targeted as the sound of breaking glass or a car alarm would cause the thief to have to leave the area in a hurry.

"That's why they're called crimes of opportunity," said Cordero. "An unlocked door makes it easy for them to commit the theft."

Anyone with information on this and other criminal activity is asked to contact the Santa Paula Police Department, 525-4474.

If the caller would prefer to remain anonymous, they can call

CARS: Continued on Page 2

Eduardo Gomez: Santa Paula woman attends Medal of Honor ceremony for 'Lalo'

By Peggy Kelly
Santa Paula Times

A soldier described as "such a nice man, a gentleman always caring and giving to the family," was recognized for also caring and giving to his country when the late US Army 1st Class Sgt. Eduardo Gomez was honored with a Medal of Honor, the nation's highest service award.

President Barack Obama awarded the Medal of Honor to 24 Army veterans for conspicuous gallantry, correcting what was in some cases decades of discrimination, on March 18 at the White House.

The veterans were honored for their valor during major combat operations in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War; among the recipients were 19 Hispanic, Jewish and African-American veterans overlooked previously because of their racial or ethnic backgrounds. Three of the recipients are still living.

All had previously been recognized with the Distinguished Service Cross, the nation's second highest military award, which was upgraded to the Medal of Honor in recognition of their gallantry, intrepidity and heroism above and beyond the call of duty.

Beatrice "ChaCha" Corral of Ojai, whose family was originally from Santa Paula, said they all were thrilled at the award and proud of her Uncle Eduardo, who served in World War II and Korea.

Her late father Richard Corral, had a barber shop on Ojai Street, and although his brother Eduardo never lived in Santa Paula he was a welcome visitor, "We always loved to see him, such a nice man," said Corral.

Her mother, 85-year-old Margaret Moreno, went to Washington for the ceremony.

An extended family member, Frances Meatty of Santa Paula, also attended, an experience that combined her first trip to the nation's Capitol with seeing the President of the United States.

"I've been to other places but never Washington... wow, it was such a beautiful place," and said Meatty, "I was honored being there with all those people getting awards," including three living military members honored for more recent actions.

Meatty first met Gomez "When he accompanied my uncle's body back to Santa Paula after he was killed in an automobile crash," while in the service in 1953.

"My uncle never made it to Korea... and that's when I met Lalo," she noted using Gomez's nickname.

A native of Los Angeles who grew up in Mexico, Gomez was stateside recovering from wounds he received in battle.

Meatty said she saw Gomez over the years, the last time in 1962 when she picked him up in Phoenix for a trip to Mexico.

"Relatives actually tried to fix me up with him later, when I was widowed," Meatty noted with a laugh.

"He was such a nice man, a gentleman... always caring and giving to the family..."

Gomez gave a lot to many: his Medal of Honor came about 64 years after his heroic actions to save his men in a rice paddy near Tabu-dong, South Korea where he was wounded in action.

On Sept. 3, 1950, a regiment of Chinese and North Koreans attacked Gomez and his men as the Americans were helping to set up a defensive perimeter. Although rocket fire managed to stop several enemy tanks another kept firing and advancing until, in full view of the enemy, Gomez crawled some 30 yards to the tank, climbed onto it, opened the hatch and threw in a grenade. The explosion riddled his upper torso with shrapnel.

When Gomez returned to his machine-gun post he held his position as the enemy advanced, providing protective cover fire for his men even though he had been wounded and his hands also burned from the heat of the machine-gun he manned without a tripod.

When the battle was over Gomez not only declined to be evacuated, but he also refused

MEDAL: Continued on Page 2

Walk:

volunteers helping at the event.

Fogata noted that with many churches having services "I'm glad for the turnout we have... I wish maybe we had better weather but people are here and they're very sincere about ending the violence in Santa Paula."

Crosswhite told the crowd, "Nothing will change if we don't make changes," and she encouraged those in the crowd to introduce themselves to one another before dozens of doves were released.

As the doves soared above the park Crosswhite noted the birds "flying free" should encourage all to make the decision to live free and in peace.

The end to gangs and violence said Mayor Rick Cook, a retired SPPD Sgt., "Takes more than police cars... it takes families," to quell gang involvement.

"Watch your kids, be involved," said Cook. "We have a great Boys and Girls Club here... make it better for our kids," so they avoid gang involvement that leads to violence and the heartbreak it brings.

Seeing the crowd said Fogata, "Really makes me proud to be a resident of Santa Paula," and he urged participants to keep the candles to light at home as a call for unity.

He also asked that people consider making donations to the Moran and Elizalde families to help with the expenses related to the loss of their family members.

"We're here to honor two victims," but Police Chief Steve McLean said, "We also honor other families," that have suffered loss through violence.

Although "compassionate to those who have lost their way," and turned to gangs, McLean said

Medal:

medical treatment.

His valor occurred during one of the early major battles of the Korean War; he had also landed on Omaha Beach on D Day during World War II, but the family remembers he always had little to say about his heroic acts, although he was proud of his military career.

Gomez retired from the military after 30 years and died in 1974 of a heart attack in Mexico City.

When the awarding of the medals was announced Abraham H. Foxman, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, said, "Justice delayed is better than justice denied. It is a very welcome effort and show of sensitivity by this administration to seek to redress acts of discrimination, and it is especially laudatory that it relates to our soldiers who fought so bravely on behalf of this country in America's wars."

Those who knew Gomez said he never voiced any instances of discrimination that occurred while he served, and being overlooked for the military's highest honor did not concern him.

"Lalo was a modest man, a very brave leader and soldier," said Meatty, "just a wonderful man..."

Cars:

the SPPD recorded Tip Hotline, 933-5691.

In addition, tips can be emailed to the SPPD at tipline@spcity.org

Those with information can also call Ventura County Crime Stoppers at (800) 222-TIPS (8477). The caller may remain anonymous and the call is not recorded.

Ventura County Crime Stoppers can also be contacted by texting "Busted" plus your message to CRIMES (274637).

Crime Stopper Tips can also be sent via the website, www.venturacountycrimestoppers.org

Crime Stoppers will pay up to a \$1,000 reward for a tip that leads to a felony arrest as confirmed by the arresting agency.

Santa Paula "will no longer tolerate the killing of our children..."

"I want the community to be safe, to have peace," and, said Aurora Zepeda Cantero, Ashley Moran's mother, "to have justice for the ones murdered..."

Ashley's sister Sandra Cantero agreed and thanked the community for their support, noting, "All I want is justice for my sister..."

Ruthie Cantero, the mother of Joanna Marie Orozco, 21, who was shot to death and her male companion wounded by a gang member on Election Day 2000, also spoke of the ongoing hurt from the violent death of a loved one.

McLean said people should step up and offer police information on those that commit violent crimes: "They don't need names, just point us in the right direction..."

The Rev. Mike Harris offered a closing prayer noting if people do speak up, "justice will come to Santa Paula..."

During the candle lighting ceremony Crosswhite said those seeking peace must know and care about one another: "Like these lights we need to be the light in

our community, we need to be the light in our families and live in a way that lets this light shine in our city."

Between May 2013 and March 2014 Santa Paula had eight homicides, the same number of murders that had occurred over a nine-year period, from 2003 to 2012.

Two of four suspects are in custody for the Elizalde homicide; no arrests have been made in the beating and stabbing death of Moran, who was in the early stages of pregnancy when her body was discovered.

Story Pirates

The Blanchard Community Library present "Story Pirates" on Tuesday, May 20th, 6:30 p.m.

Story Pirates will delight and surprise you with puppets, songs, and outrageous sketches!

Story Pirates is a nationally respected education and media organization founded in 2003 to celebrate the words and ideas of young people.

The Blanchard Community Library is located at 119 N. 8th Street. For more information call 525-3615.

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Santa Paula native Gil Valencia brings Music for the Soul at Ag Museum

Santa Paula native Gil Valencia Brings Music for the Soul to Agriculture Museum. With decades of experience playing for audiences in Ventura, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles counties, as well as in Costa Rica, Gil knows how to connect with people through music. On Friday, May 2, 2014, from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., his band,

VALENCIA & Friends, will reach out to the audience at the Museum of Ventura County's Agriculture Museum with their unique blend of music for the soul. During the Museum's monthly "Music at the Ag" night, Gil Valencia, on lead vocals and percussion, Chris Smith on keyboards, Steve Wachsmann on guitar, and Adán Valencia on vocals and congas will play Smooth Jazz, Pop, Blues, Latin, and R_B favorites.

Admission to "Music at the Ag" is \$10 for general public; \$5 for museum members; \$2 for children under 18 with an adult. Seating is first come, first seated.

Friday, May 2, is also Santa Paula's Main Street Cruise

Night, from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. Visitors are encouraged to extend their evening at the Agriculture Museum, at 926 Railroad Avenue, just one block from Main Street. Dinner items will be made to order at a Food Truck parked just outside

the Agriculture Museum, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Chairs and tables for dining will be provided around the Agriculture Museum's indoor music stage. Information can be found at www.venturamuseum.org and (805) 525-3100.

Homework Help at Library

The Blanchard Community Library, 119 N. 8th Street is offering "Homework Help." The homework help is on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., beginning now and ending May 31. The program is sponsored by the Blanchard Community Library and the tutoring is provided by the Santa Paula High School CSF Club. For more information call 525-3615.

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Santa Paula Times

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