

Moscow still safe, mayor says

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By Kelsey Samuels of the Tribune

Wounds remain, but city still friendly three years after ambush-style attack



Flowers adorn the area near the First Presbyterian Church at Moscow after the shooting in Moscow thr...



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MOSCOW - Mayor Nancy Chaney said Tuesday memories of the sniper shootings in 2007 won't go away, but Moscow is still a safe place.

"Has life returned to normal for most people? Yes. But have we forgotten? Absolutely not," she said. "I think newcomers to the area will see Moscow as a safe, friendly community and that's unchanged, but there are some wounds that are still there."

Today is the three-year anniversary of an "ambush-style" attack committed by Jason Hamilton. He killed his wife, a church caretaker, Officer Lee Newbill and himself, and seriously injured Sgt. Brannon Jordan and a University of Idaho student.

"I am alarmed just across the board about the violent nature of our society," Chaney said, "that there seems to be such anger out there. Combined with a lethal weapon, it's even more troublesome."

She said people should focus on building up community, not tearing it down.

"There's a lot of publicity now about the Tea Party movement, about the 'government, stay out of our faces,' about the Second Amendment and all of that," she said. "I think if people would work on loving each other ... that we would be able to dedicate some of our energies toward good and the positive. I am unsettled by that part of human nature that tends to say 'I need to pack heat everywhere.' "

Assistant Police Chief David Duke said people tend to see violence on the news and think it's happening more often and in closer proximity that it is, and that they should look at the underlying factors as to why it happens.

"That's what I respect about this community," Duke said. "They don't assume that just because a gun is used, it's directly related to gun violence. They look at the underlying ... factors. Overall in this community, you have to go back many years but the trend's always been there. What I think brought it out was some high-profile events like the Hamilton shooting where Lee was killed, followed immediately by several other shootings ... Guns and violence go together, but it's not the guns that do the killing. It's the person behind it."

Duke said he learned law enforcement has the respect of Moscow residents.

"That was exhibited during the procession," he said. "People came out and honored Lee, which honors us."

Latah County Sheriff Wayne Rausch agreed.

"I thought there was a tremendous amount of support for law enforcement shown by this community," he said.

Rausch said the world changed dramatically after 9-11.

"I think what it's shown us is that criminals are getting worse and are certainly not concerned about their own safety or comfort, as in the case of the guy that did this," he said. "Once he was done with his gruesome task, he went over and put a bullet in his head, and in a church of all places. I think it maybe wasn't so much of an eye-opener for me as much as the fact the world is never going to be the same."

Chaney asks that the community respect Newbill's death and not use it as a political advantage.

"One thing I would say is that I wouldn't take the anniversary of Lee Newbill's death as an opportunity to fan the flames of firearms regulation," she said. "I think it is insulting to his family and hurtful to people who remember him. To officers who remember him that night, to me."

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