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Friend of man who drove a truck into Minneapolis protesters speaks out

By **Sheila Mulrooney Eldred**

When Lonnie McQuirter, owner of a beloved gas station in south Minneapolis, saw the clip of protesters banging on a tanker truck and throwing rocks, his heart sank.

He recognized the driver immediately as one of his fuel delivery truckers. McQuirter had called in a favor to get gas delivered to his 15-year-old shop, 36 Lyn Refuel Station, known for its low gas prices and commitment to local products. 36 Lyn has remained open thanks to neighbors standing guard through the recent tumultuous nights. After seeing the number of people out the first night via security cameras, McQuirter joined them, leaving only to take naps during the day.

On Sunday, driver Bogdan Vechirko delivered two loads of gas to 36 Lyn at McQuirter's request. Vechirko has been a consistent driver to 36 Lyn during the covid-19 pandemic, McQuirter said. Then, he ended up on an I-35W bridge where a protest was taking place.

“He’s a first-generation American family who moved here for a better life — he’s a hard-working individual,” McQuirter said. “When he left I told him to be safe and get home safely to his family ... But I feel in some ways responsible that it was because of me trying to help my customers that [this happened] and his name and reputation have been ruined.”

McQuirter said he has known Vechirko to be professional and courteous — to the point of helping McQuirter move cars that have stalled.

The truck was empty but speeding at around 70 mph when the driver saw the protest, panicked and hit the brakes, Public Safety Commissioner John Harrington said at a news conference Monday.

“We don’t have any information that makes this seem like this was an intentional act,” Harrington said, noting that he’s still surprised no one was hurt. “We got lucky or there was something miraculous happening there.”