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# Mall Goers Show Sadness, Respect: 'This is a Faith-filled Community'

Howard County residents vow to move beyond shooting

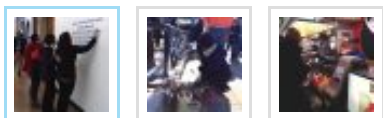
Posted by [Jennifer Donatelli](#) (Editor) , January 27, 2014 at 09:42 PM



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...e on a message imprinted on a boarded-up Zumiez  
...ened after Saturday's shooting that killed Johnson and

Brianna Benlolo. [Credit: Jennifer Donatelli]



## By Jennifer Donatelli

The atmosphere inside the Mall in Columbia was subdued Monday, the first day it reopened after a gunman killed two people and then himself Saturday morning.

There seemed to be as many members of the media and mall and law enforcement officials as the public. Many members of the public said they came to the mall to show respect for victims Brianna Benlolo, 21, and Tyler Johnson, 25, whom police say were shot by Darion Marcus Aguilar, 19, at the Zumiez store where the victims worked.

Friends Kari Tempera, Kay Brister and a woman who declined to identify herself, sobbed outside Zumiez, which had messages from mall officials imprinted on the boarded-up storefront.

Tempera touched her friend Johnson's name, crying as her unidentified friend rubbed her

back. She said she didn't know Benlolo but had worked with Johnson at a restaurant in Ellicott City.

Tempera, of Baltimore, said she didn't know if Johnson knew Aguilar; her friend had never mentioned him. She said she couldn't imagine why anyone would hurt her friend.

"He was always a fun person and never disliked anyone," she said. "He didn't have any enemies. He was an average young kid who worked and then in his free time would hang out with his friends."

Johnson was always a gentleman, Tempera said. When they worked at the River Hill Sports Grille, he always would escort her to her car at the end of their evening shift, she said.

Many who didn't know the victims said they also felt compelled to show their support.

Eppelina Nomile of Ellicott City said she goes to the mall four to five times a week.

"I just want to show my respect. That boy obviously had some issues," she said, referring to Aguilar. "I don't want to offend his mother, but he had something going on. Obviously, this was not his plan in life."

Patrons milled about in the food court after County Executive Ken Ulman and Rep. Elijah Cummings made remarks. People paused outside Zumiez to lay flowers. Others signed condolence messages in books at the Center Court and placed flowers in a pool.

Valerie Mohammed, an Ellicott City trauma nurse who signed a note of condolence, said her son was getting ready to come to the mall Saturday before the shooting. The shooting could have happened anywhere, she said.

"I work at the trauma center. You never know. It can be anywhere," she said. "My kids come here. I'm sure they feel safer here than in Baltimore. This is an isolated incident. It could happen anywhere."

Several other patrons said they felt similarly. Some said they were gladdened by the turnout of patrons. Few seemed to purchase anything, however, and at least two stores were closed Monday.

"I wanted to get my food and affirm this is a great place," said Richard Bass, a Columbia resident waiting to order lunch at Subway. "This was a tragedy, but it shouldn't prevent Columbia from being what it has been - a great community."

At least one patron said she still felt unnerved. Nene Harley, of Clinton, said it was precisely because the incident was isolated that she felt uneasy.

But others said the community would band together to get past the incident.

"This is a faith-filled community," said Nomile, clutching a rose before Ulman and Cummings' remarks. "Our motto is 'Choose Civility' and that's what we're going to do."

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