

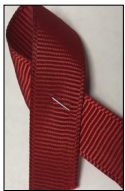
Walk of respect, in honor of school victims

Quakertown students memorialized the casualties in Parkland with a short, dignified presentation.

By Gary Weckselblatt

*Alyssa Alhadeff, 14, soccer player;
Scott Beigel, 35, geography teacher;
Martin Duque Anguiano, 14, funny baby brother.*

One by one, the names and identifying features of the 17 victims in last month's deadly shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, escaped into the quiet, cold air of Alumni Field.



Approximately 800 students from Quakertown Community High School solemnly walked on the track outside of the football field Wednesday as the names were read by fellow students -- Olivia Burke, Ally Gunning, Kalli Hildebrandt, Shayna Kelly and Kasie Bloss -- over the loudspeakers.



Quakertown Community High School students, some holding hashtag signs, walk outside the football field to pay their respects to the shooting victims at Stoneman Douglas High School.

Nicholas Dworet, 17, swimmer; Aaron Feis, 37, assistant football coach; Jaime Guttenberg, 14, daughter, sister.

"It was just so touching," said Marissa Barr, a junior journalism student. "Looking at all of the students walking, you could see what hearing the names and seeing the faces did to them."

Pictures of the victims were held by

students along the walking path. Red ribbons were handed out to those who requested one. Some students strolled holding signs with hashtags: #ParklandStrong ... #BeKind ... #SupportEachOther ... #NeverAgain.

For 17 minutes, students moved along the walking path inside the football stadium. After each minute, another name was read. It was not hard to find emotion well in the eyes of the walkers.

Chris Hixon, 49, athletic director; Luke Hoyer, 15, contagious laugh; Cara Loughran, 14, Irish dancer.

Quakertown students were among thousands who walked out of school Wednesday to pay their respects to those who died for nothing more than going to class or working in a school.

"Today we wear black in mourning of the dead and ribbons in their school colors," Olivia announced at the stadium. "Today's non-partisan walkout serves as a memorial and an opportunity to raise our voices in support of



Morgan Small, left, and Sarah Shaiman hold photos of the victims.

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school safety.”

She explained that her schoolmates were born between 1999 and 2003, just in the shadow of

Columbine, where 13 students were gunned down.

When Olivia's generation were in elementary and middle school, 26 students and staff were killed at Sandy Hook.

“At that time, people said that something needed to change and this could never happen again,” she said. “Now we are all in high school and people spread the same message, but not enough has been done to bring an end to these violent attacks on schools. This has led students to decide that they need to speak up for themselves and make themselves heard.

“The students who lived through the Parkland shooting are making television appearances, are speaking out on social media, and pressuring politicians, including the president, to try and find a solution to end this violence. They have sparked a national movement to increase school safety and to make real change. They inspired this walkout today, as we are here to mourn their friends and help send a message that they started.

“That message is - enough is enough. We need to be safe in school. And the lives we have lost should still be with us today.”

Gina Montalto, 14, winter guard member; Joaquin Oliver, 17, liked football, basketball, the Venezuelan national soccer team, urban graffiti and hip-hop; Alaina Petty, 14, Junior ROTC, loved to serve.

The student-led effort to memorialize Parkland's victims began not long after the February 14 attack. As more and more Quakertown students began expressing a need to take some type of action, they began meeting with teachers. Administrators quickly became part of the discussions.

Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner supported the students' collective voice, describing the issue as an “extraordinary educational op-



Student leaders and faculty following the walkout.

portunity.” His primary concern, however, was for their safety. So he involved law enforcement in the walkout discussion.

“This was a total team effort,” he said. “I can't tell you how proud I was of the students and faculty members who were with them. The silence was almost deafening. The reverence they showed for the students and faculty who died at Parkland was quite a thing to see.”

Ricki Stein, who teaches journalism and English at the high school, was the lead facilitator in student discussions.

“I'm really proud,” she said. “They organized and they kept this non-political. They were so solemn, and there was a respectful tone from every kid who participated.”

Students exited the school at 9:45 a.m. and were back in the building by 10:25 a.m.

QCHS student Christian Holman said “Too many kids have died. Today we said, ‘Enough is enough.’ We're trying to encourage more safety in schools.”

Christian said the superintendent's support “really means a lot. It shows he wants to see change as well.”

Meadow Pollack, 18, full of energy; Helena Ramsay, 17, kind hearted; Alex Schachter, 14, played baritone and trombone.

At Strayer Middle School, nearly all students participated in a 17-minute walk around the school track to honor the Park-

land victims.

At the Sixth Grade Center, students in classrooms held a moment of silence while others chose to go to the library for 17 minutes of silence.



Ana Handel holds photos of the Florida shooting victims.

No student was forced to take part in the event. More than half of the 1,700 high school students chose not to be part of the outdoor event.

“This is about our future, it's our responsibility,” said Gage Hopkins, a senior. “This is something we can't let die. We need it to mean something.”

Carmen Schentrup, 16, National Merit Scholar semifinalist; Peter Wang, 15, Junior ROTC.

“In our efforts to make school safer, we encourage everyone to make 17 new friends,” Olivia concluded. “We are stronger when we work together.”

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Quakertown Police gather after Wednesday's high school walkout.