

Lonoke faces 'giants' that took 3 lives

1,000 honor slain family at high school

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ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

LONOKE — The signs in the Lonoke High School gym read, "You're in Rabbit Country." And on Wednesday, Rabbit Country was in mourning.

The town's grief was evident in its downtown. Long trains of cars with their headlights on moved through the nearly empty streets on the way to the high school. Lines of parked cars stretched for five blocks on the six streets nearest Lonoke High School, home of the Jackrabbits.

All Lonoke schools were closed for the day; the Lonoke Law and Accounting building was shuttered with a handwritten, yellow Post-It note stuck on the door that read: "Closed for Stocks memorial service."

Nearly 1,000 people left their schools, homes and places of business to gather at the high school's gymnasium and sit on scarred wooden benches and the shiny wooden floor to remember the Stocks family.

Joe Stocks, 46, Barbara Stocks, 43, and their daughter, Heather, 18, were shot and killed in their Furlow home Friday night in what police are calling a botched robbery attempt by son, Heath, 20.

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After a memorial service in the Lonoke High School gym Wednesday morning, students gather around a display of photos of fellow student Heather Stocks and

her parents, who were shot to death in their home at Furlow on Friday night. Nearly 1,000 people attended the memorial service.

Memorial

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Heath Stocks has been charged with three counts of capital murder.

Wednesday morning's services were not about the son imprisoned a half-mile away. People had gathered to grieve for the dead. The focus was on Heather, who was an honor student at Lonoke High School and captain of the cheerleading team.

They sat in the bleachers and on hard plastic chairs and sang "Amazing Grace" and the 130th Psalm — "Out of the depths I cry unto thee, O Lord! Lord hear my cry." — in a gym decorated with black and purple ribbons, beneath purple banners that spoke of the school's athletic success. The banner above the choir read: "Sr. Boys 1994 AA Football Champions," a team Heath Stocks had helped take to the state crown.

"Heather lived her life with us, and now, through us, she will continue to live," her friend and classmate Natasha Cole told the 1,000 mourners. High school boys in the bleachers fidgeted, running their fingers beneath their collars, looking for relief from their too-tight ties and newly ironed shirts.

"We have been facing a giant here for the last four or five days," said the Rev. Robert Marble, the Stocks family pastor. "But as I was trying to face my own giant, I thought about the giants the family had faced in that split second."

That split second has changed the face of Lonoke County, residents say.

"I was kind of shocked when I heard about it; the whole community was," said Furlow resident Teddy Wilson, a neighbor of the family. "Then we all got scared, didn't know what was happening and worried about our own families."

The students of Lonoke High School looked hard at the gym floor



The Stocks family — Joe and Barbara and their children Heath (left) and Heather — in a family portrait made in the 1980s.

during the two-hour service, sometimes shifting their gazes to the purple table in the middle of the room with the portraits of Heather, her family and Heather's cheerleading and beauty pageant trophies. Sometimes they shook their heads or wiped mascara from their tear-stained cheeks. Sometimes they

moved their mouths in silent conversation. Sometimes they just stared and cried.

"The kids had all weekend to spend together, to bond, to come together," said Paul Human, superintendent of the Lonoke School District. "They're working their way through this. They have taught us



This recent photo of Heather Stocks was among those on display at the Lonoke High School gym Wednesday.

adults a lot of things in the past four or five days."

The school district has been offering counseling for its students, Human said, and will continue to do so for the rest of the year.

As the service broke up, a line 10 people deep and 40 feet long formed to view the purple table. When those in line finally made it to the table, they would look at the pictures, at Barbara Stocks' yearbook, opened to the page that showed that she was voted most beautiful in her class. They looked at a wedding picture, the couple cutting the cake.

And they looked at a large portrait of Heather, taken this past year, leaning against a tree in blue jeans, white blouse and black blazer. Then they glanced over the trophies and flowers and came to another picture, obviously taken long ago, before Heath and his father had the falling out that police think led to the murders.

It was a picture in a simple gold frame. A picture of two smiling parents and two smiling children.