

Lakeland police release video of shooting that - News Herald, The (Panama City, FL) - December 27, 2018

December 27, 2018 | News Herald, The (Panama City, FL) | Gary White The Ledger

LAKELAND — An early morning shooting Wednesday involving Lakeland Police Department officers has left a Winter Haven teenager dead.

The incident took place during a gathering of about 200 people in the parking lot of Salem's Gyros and Subs restaurant, LPD said in a news release. LPD spokesman Gary Gross said the agency received a call from an employee at Salem's requesting officers to clear the parking lot at 101 E. Memorial Blvd., at the intersection with North Florida Avenue.

Michael Jerome Taylor, 17, of 3741 Imperial Drive in Winter Haven, died after being shot by officers, Lakeland Police Chief Larry Giddens said.

Officers responded at 2:21 a.m. to a call from an employee at Salem's about a large crowd gathered in the parking lot, LPD said. Officers attempted to clear the parking lot of people loitering when Officer Raj Patel noticed a black Chevrolet Camaro that fit the description of a vehicle stolen from Winter Haven.

The vehicle, reported stolen to the Polk County Sheriff's Office, was parked sideways facing southwest, an LPD news release said. As multiple officers approached the vehicle, the driver, later identified as Taylor, attempted to flee by rapidly accelerating the car, placing officers and others in immediate danger, LPD reported.

The vehicle accelerated south toward Officer Markais Neal, putting him in fear for his life, and he fired at the vehicle, the release said. Two other officers also fired at the vehicle as it accelerated through the parking lot, striking several vehicles and a utility pole.

The Camaro continued south, hitting another vehicle and propelling it into the wall of an adjacent business, Bike Barn. At some point during the incident, a female passenger jumped out of the stolen vehicle and was detained, LPD said.

Officers removed Taylor from the driver's seat and immediately began first aid. A firearm was found on the driver's side floorboard of the Camaro, LPD said.

Taylor was transported to Lakeland Regional Health Medical Center and was later declared dead. As of Wednesday afternoon, LPD said it was unclear how many times the suspect was shot or how many rounds the officers fired. The Lakeland Police Department's Violent Crimes Unit and the State Attorney's Office responded to the scene.

LPD released surveillance video Wednesday afternoon from a camera fixed at Salem's showing the entire 42-second episode.

Taylor was on felony probation as a violent offender of special concern under the anti-murder act for robbery with a weapon, burglary while armed, fleeing and eluding with a high-speed chase, burglary of a conveyance and grand theft auto, LPD said. The loaded gun found in the Camaro had previously been reported stolen.

The female passenger is currently in custody, according to Giddens. LPD is not identifying her because she is a witness to a homicide.

Patel, 23, has been with LPD for 18 months and Neal, 28, for one year. A third officer, Joseph Novis, 25, also was involved in the shooting, LPD reported. As is agency policy following officer-involved shootings, the three have been placed on paid administrative leave for a minimum of three days.

Crime-scene tape surrounded the parking lot Wednesday morning. Several vehicles remained in the parking lot, and the restaurant was closed.

The black Camaro remained in place, its front end touching the parked car that crashed into the Bike Barn wall. Bullet holes could be seen in the rear window and the left and right rear side panels.

Salem's was the site of an incident early Thanksgiving morning in which a melee broke out and several people were arrested. The eatery is a regular gathering spot for people who congregate after nightclubs close at 2 a.m., Gross said following that incident.

Gross said many of those who gather at Salem's migrate from Rumors, a nightclub at 935 E. Memorial Blvd. in the Town Center shopping plaza, about six blocks east of Salem's. The restaurant is usually open until 4 a.m.

Records provided by LPD show that the agency received 203 calls for service from the vicinity of Salem's in the past year. The calls included narcotics violations, fights, theft, assault and battery and a hit-and-run incident on Sept. 23.

The records indicated LPD received 325 calls for service in the past year from the vicinity of Rumors for things such as narcotics violations, fights, assault and battery and an episode of shots fired on April 2.

Salem's is a small chain of restaurants based in Tampa. A woman who answered a call Wednesday morning at the corporate office said no one was available to talk to the media.

Gross said LPD might have a discussion with Salem's management to see whether the business is taking steps to ensure safety on its property.

"Like a lot of other businesses, they just call when it gets out of control," Gross said. "It would be up to them if they want to hire a detail officer."

Giddens asked that anyone with information on the incident contact the Lakeland Police Department at 863-834-6900.

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