

## 1 dead, 17 wounded at festival - Plain Dealer, The (Cleveland, OH) - June 18, 2018 - page A1

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One person was killed and at least 17 people were shot early Sunday at a cherished all-night arts festival in Trenton, New Jersey, in what may have been a neighborhood dispute unrelated to the event, authorities said.

The person who was killed, a 33-year-old man, was believed to have been shot dead by police and was one of multiple gunmen.

He was identified as **Tahaji Wells**, Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo Onofri said during a press conference Sunday evening.

The shooting appeared to be a gang-related dispute, Onofri said.

Prior to the shooting, fights broke out inside and outside Roebling Wire Works, where the annual event was held.

Police attempted to disperse the crowd and urged the organizers to shut down the festival, Onofri said.

"Those individuals continued to loiter and additional fights broke out, and then the shooting occurred," Onofri said, noting the suspects first shot at each other before police opened fire.

Authorities said Wells was carrying a handgun with an extended magazine — a gun that's illegal to possess in New Jersey. It was one of several guns recovered at the scene.

Officials said the second gunman had been arrested.

Authorities do not have any reason to believe the festival was targeted or that the shooting was an act of terrorism, Casey DeBlasio, a spokeswoman for the prosecutor's office, said. She said authorities were investigating a nearby carjacking in connection with the shooting and that multiple other motives were being considered.

Reed Gusciora, the mayor-elect, confirmed there had been unspecified threats of violence before the shooting. He referred specifically to a Facebook post and said the city had increased the number of police and fire department workers at the festival. He said an investigation would determine whether police had responded appropriately to the threat.

For many Trenton residents, who have long endured entrenched issues with crime, poverty and drugs, the shooting was a blow to the city's revitalization as an arts hub. The 24-hour arts festival, Art All Night, was a centerpiece of that effort.

More than 25,000 people were projected to attend the festival, now in its 12th year. The Roebling Wire Works was once home to a factory that supplied wire cables for the Brooklyn and Golden Gate bridges.

"Trenton has been making a comeback. Art All Night has been the cornerstone of that comeback," said Krystal Knapp, who was volunteering at the event when the shooting took place. "It's just devastating to everyone in the community."

Knapp, who runs the local news websites Planet Princeton and Planet Trenton, was counting attendees at the entrance to the building around 2:45 a.m. when she heard scuffling inside, then screaming, and finally gun shots.

Droves of the thousand or so attendees scrambled for the door of the long, narrow building, pushing Knapp to the ground and bruising and cutting her knees. Paintings and artwork were knocked off the walls. A woman pulled Knapp behind a car as another woman nearby was shot in the leg.

Knapp stayed behind the car as, 15 feet away, a gunman was shot and killed.

DeBlasio said four people, including a 13-year-old boy, were in critical condition. A total of 22 people were injured, including the 17 who were shot.

Kate Stier, a spokeswoman for Capital Health, which runs the hospital treating some of the victims, said the others who were injured had been trampled.

"It saddens me that a public attack such as this is what has brought major attention to our capital city on Father's Day," Mayor Eric Jackson said in a statement.

Gov. Phil Murphy arrived in Trenton on Sunday morning and spoke at Galilee Baptist Church about the need for stricter gun laws.

"It's yet another reminder of the senselessness of gun violence," he said.

Last week he signed a package of gun control bills into law that would, among other measures, require the seizure of firearms when a mental health professional determines someone poses a threat, and require background checks for private gun sales.

New Jersey was ranked by the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence as second to California in having the country's most stringent gun restrictions. The center was named for Gabrielle Giffords, the former congresswoman who was gravely injured by gunfire in 2011.

Festival organizers said in a statement on Facebook they were "deeply saddened" and that rest of the festival would be canceled. It was set to end at 3 p.m. Sunday. They did not respond to a request for comment.

"Our hearts ache and our eyes are blurry but our dedication and resolve to building a better

Trenton through community, creativity and inspiration will never fade,” the statement said. “We’re still processing much of this and we don’t have many answers at this time but please know that our staff, our volunteers, our artists and musicians all seem to be healthy and accounted for.”

NJ.com contributed

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