

Officer-involved shooting leaves teen dead - Destin Log, The (FL) - December 26, 2018

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

The incident took place at approximately 2 a.m. Wednesday, the Lakeland Police Department said in a news release, during a gathering of approximately 200 people in the parking lot of Salem's Fresh Eats restaurant at the intersection of East Memorial Boulevard and 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.

Responding to the gathering of people, LPD officers spotted a stolen Camaro out of Winter Haven in the parking lot, the release said. Giddens said that fact was confirmed by the Polk County Sheriff's Office.

Giddens said as multiple officers approached the vehicle issuing verbal commands, the driver accelerated from a parked position, "aggressively" speeding through the parking lot toward an officer and a group of patrons who were scattering from the approaching Camaro.

Giddens called the scene "chaotic" as the officer feared for his life as well as the large group of scattering patrons.

Officers opened fire on the vehicle, which struck multiple vehicles and a light pole, Giddens said. The Camaro eventually rammed into a parked car on North Florida Avenue, then continued through a block wall and into the Bike Barn.

Giddens noted that prior to those multiple collisions, a female passenger was able to roll out of the vehicle. That woman alerted authorities to the fact that a firearm may have been in the Camaro, which was later found on the driver's floorboard.

Following the collision with the Bike Barn business, officers got Taylor out of the Camaro and began to perform first aid. Giddens confirmed that he was later pronounced dead at Lakeland Regional Health Medical Center.

Taylor has four previous felony arrests, ranging from burglary to grand theft auto, LPD said.

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

The LPD officers involved in the incident are Markais Neal, 28; Joseph Novis, 25; and Raj Patel, 23.

Neal has one year of service, while Novis and Patel each have been with LPD for 18 months.

As is LPD policy following officer-involved shootings, the three have been placed on paid administrative leave for a minimum of three days.

LPD's Violent Crimes Unit and the State Attorney's Office responded to the scene. At this time, it is unknown how many times the suspect was shot or how many rounds the officers fired, the release said.

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

The parking lot at Salem's was the site of an incident early on 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 night clubs close, LPD spokesman Gary Gross said following that incident.

This is a developing story. Check back at theledger.com for more information as it becomes available.

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