

Downtown Aurora businesses 'focus on positive' - Daily Herald (Arlington Heights, IL) - March 24, 2018

March 24, 2018 | Daily Herald (Arlington Heights, IL) | Marie Wilson mwilson@dailyherald.com

Downtown Aurora businesses 'focus on positive' after fatal shooting

The fatal police-involved shootout Thursday in Aurora was three blocks from the Paramount Theatre and two blocks from city hall, but business leaders say it shouldn't cause people to shy away from downtown.

There's no reason for the case to adversely affect businesses, said Jimi Allen, whose Bureau Gravity marketing company is nearing completion of a workspace for employees and clients just down LaSalle Street from where the shooting took place.

"It's up to business owners to make this downtown alive," he said and bring "more people making things here than making trouble."

The shooting also doesn't change the goals of those promoting downtown activities and culture, said Marissa Amoni with Aurora Downtown, a business coalition that plans events in the area.

"In a city of our size, we are lucky to have a great police patrol and a safe downtown," Amoni said. "We won't be discouraged by this rare event."

Police said the shooting took place about 9:45 p.m. when investigators followed a vehicle leaving a "known gang house" on Lake Street just west of the Fox River and tried to conduct a traffic stop.

When the driver, identified as 36-year-old **Santiago Calderon** of Aurora, pulled over, police said he shot at investigators, then drove away, crashing into another vehicle at Galena Boulevard and Broadway, just east of the river. After the crash, police said Calderon got out of his car and ran, exchanging gunfire with two investigators.

Police said the man was killed on LaSalle Street between Galena Boulevard and Downer Place. Officer Matt Huber was shot in the leg and officer Colin Griffin injured his shoulder. Both were treated at an Aurora hospital and released.

Allen, who has been working for eight years to open a new office and event space at 56 S. LaSalle St. in a former auto garage, said he stays in the area because it takes investment to create a new vibrancy and deter crime.

"As long as people are present and good things are going on, we don't have to worry about this stuff," Allen said.

Amoni said people patronizing downtown businesses such as Leland Legends, Gillerson's Grubbery

or Endiro Coffee stayed safe Thursday, even while police were tracking down and exchanging gunfire with the driver involved in the shooting.

"The police also responded very well with cordoning off the area so everyone was safe," Amoni said.

She said additional lighting recently was installed on Broadway and the area often remains busy in the evenings with shows at the Paramount Theatre — although there was no production Thursday night.

Tim Rater, the Paramount's president and CEO, said patrons don't tell "scary stories" about their experiences coming into downtown Aurora, parking and attending shows.

"When they come, they feel safe," he said.

The theater provides security and police routinely patrol the area. As a resident and a downtown employee for nearly eight years, Rater said he's never felt threatened in any way — and Thursday's shooting didn't change that.

Because the events leading to the shooting began outside downtown, Rater and Amoni said it shouldn't be seen as an episode of "downtown crime."

She also said the shooting shouldn't deter people from attending activities in the area, such as the Egg Hunt on the Island on Saturday, the third annual Food Truck Fest on Friday, May 4, or Downtown Aurora Magic on June 8 and 9.

That's Allen's approach, too. Instead of shying away from the area where the shooting occurred, he wants to bring more people there as clients who come for meetings or guests who come for parties at the future Gravity Building.

"We need to focus on what is positive," Allen said. "The only answer is 'make it better.'"