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ALLSTON BRIGHTON

Brighton neighbors remember victim of fatal shooting

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 11, 2011 04:16 PM

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(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

One day after a fatal shooting in an residential building there, a heavy police presence remained at the John J. Carroll apartment complex.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The Brighton apartment complex where police said a gunman with a cache of weapons and a history of mental illness fatally shot an elderly neighbor remained blocked with caution tape and a strong police presence this afternoon.

Richard Brown, 88, lives in an apartment building adjacent to where victim William J. Thomas lived and remembered his 78-year-old neighbor, "Bill," as an "interesting man; fun to get along with."

"He was very good at with cars," Brown said Thursday by phone. "I used to talk to him about some of the repairs he was working on."

Brown said that despite having hip problems, Thomas "managed to do some [car] repairs still."

The neighbor said Thomas had only recently begun using a wheelchair regularly instead of a walker to get around, but even so, he still drove. Brown said a new Chrysler 300M Thomas had recently bought remained parked in his usual parking space.

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Brown said that space is reserved for handicapped people, but “people used to his [space] and he used to raise hell with them. There was always someone parked there that shouldn’t be.”

“I thought that was an awful thing for people to do,” he added.

While he would see Thomas around once a week, the neighbor said he had “no idea at all” who the alleged gunman, 54-year-old Randy Moore, was. Moore lived in the same building as Thomas.

Boston police responded to reports of a shooting at the John J. Carroll Apartments, a complex reserved for elderly and disabled residents, on Ledgemere Road around 10:45 a.m. Wednesday. The shooting sparked a frantic evacuation, and the suspect held police in a standoff before surrendering.

Moore **pleaded not guilty** in Brighton Municipal Court Thursday to charges of first-degree murder and the attempted murder of police officers who responded to the scene. Judge Franco Gobourne ordered Moore held without bail.

Brown said he’s not concerned about continuing to live in the complex.

“I feel fine. I don’t see anything wrong with the people that are here,” he said. “It’s really fairly quiet in this complex. It has been very pleasant, and I assume it will stay that way after this.”

Bill McGonagle, director of the Boston Housing Authority, **told the Globe yesterday** that Moore was diagnosed as a schizophrenic and has lived in public housing for the disabled for many years. He said the fatal shooting underscored the danger of placing people with mental illness and substance-abuse problems alongside elderly residents.

“We’re moving these folks in next door to our grandmothers and grandfathers,” he told the Globe Wednesday. “It’s absolutely outrageous public policy. I’ve been getting complaints about this for 20 years.”

Housing authorities are required by federal law to have a certain percentage of disabled residents in public developments, he said.

But, Brown, who has lived in the Brighton complex for around 7 or 8 years, said, “I fundamentally do not believe in living with one type of people only. I think a complex is better if it’s mixed.”

He used to live in an area with elderly-only housing.

“Elderly-only is really depressing,” Brown said. “You have people dying all the time. I think it’s a healthier situation to have a mixture.”

Leteria Roberts, 72, lives in the apartment complex several buildings away from where the shooting occurred. She was among those evacuated and temporarily taken to a nearby city facility with staff from Boston’s elder services agency.

She said she was inside her apartment watching television when she heard a noise that caused her to go to the window where she saw police outside.

Otherwise, “I never saw anything,” she said Thursday walking on a Chestnut Hill Avenue sidewalk in front of the complex.

She said she's never had any problems at the complex, and despite yesterday's shooting, “I don't worry.”

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Roberts remembered seeing Thomas occasionally around the apartment complex. He would always kindly wave to her.

McGonagle told the Globe yesterday the shooting victim was "a fine, elderly gentleman" who had lived in Brighton since 1994.

Another woman who walked from the complex toward an MBTA bus stop this afternoon said she lives there but did not know the victim or alleged shooter and declined to identify herself.

"I'm fine," she said. "This is a good neighborhood. I stay in my house, mind my own business."

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.

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