



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Metro

Racist message is defied in Lunenburg

Rally supports targeted athlete

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 18, 2013

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MICHELE MCDONALD FOR THE GLOBE

Lunenburg High School football player Isaac Phillips read a statement at a candlelight vigil Sunday that was organized to respond to racist graffiti painted on his house.

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LUNENBURG — Several hundred residents packed in and around a gazebo in the center of town Sunday night holding a candlelight vigil to show their support for a 13-year-old high school football player whose home was recently spray-painted with a racial slur.

Isaac Phillips, the football player, looked out into the crowd of hundreds, facing a sea of teammates wearing blue-and-white jerseys, and said he was struck by those who rallied around him in solidarity.

Local and state elected officials were also there, as was the superintendent of schools, the high school principal, classmates, teachers, and neighbors.

Still, Phillips told the crowd that he could not help but think about the people he felt had abandoned him in this moment of need — his coaches.

“I don’t know who to trust, and I’m confused,” he said.

“We’re supposed to be a team; coaches are supposed to be a role model. Well, if this is my team, if these are my coaches, I can say it’s a sad day to be a Blue Knight.”

Phillips’s mother, Andrea Brazier, 38, who is white, and his father, Anthony Phillips, 33, who is black, said they found a racial epithet using the N-word spray-painted on the foundation of their home Friday morning.

The school’s varsity football coach spoke with Phillips that day to express his support for the teen and disgust at what happened, said Pete McCauliff, athletic director for the high school, which in Lunenburg includes grades 8 through 12.

But, Brazier said it is the coaches of the freshman and junior varsity teams that her son plays for who have not reached out to him.

The family said the vandalism was the latest in a series of cruel acts, which include his cleats being doused in water and his bicycle tires slashed.

Phillips’s parents said he reported each incident to the coaches, who dismissed the idea that a teammate could be involved. But his parents said they are convinced that a player, or group of players, is responsible. His mother said players on the team have been overheard using the N-word during games.

The Lunenburg Police Department is leading the investigation into the vandalism, and the FBI and Worcester County district attorney’s office are reviewing the case.

“We’re going to work with the school department and anyone else in town we need to to make sure this doesn’t happen again,” said Lunenburg Police Chief James Marino.

At the gathering Sunday night, hundreds of residents coated their hands in different colors of paint to create colorful handprints on a large cloth banner that read: “Many Hands, One Community.”

“We are coming together because this is what we do,” said state Representative Jennifer Benson, a Democrat from Lunenburg. “We support each other, we love each other and we hold each other up. This is hope, this is love, this is what Lunenburg is really about.”

Tom Alonzo, chairman of the Board of Selectmen, called the graffiti “vile and reprehensible” and said news of how Phillips has been treated has left him feeling angry, disillusioned, and sympathetic.



“This cannot and will not ever be tolerated,” he said.

Two of Phillips’s teammates, Ryan Dame, 16, and Luke Pajari, 14, said he is well liked and did not know why anyone would do something so mean to another player.

“We’re all family,” Pajari said.

“We always stick up for each other,” Dame added.

Phillips said he does not plan to attend classes Monday and is considering switching schools.

“I’ve always wanted to play football and I always wanted to be a Blue Knight,” he said. “I never expected to be dealing with this.”

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