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Police say fatal shooting on North Side may be gang-related

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For the past decade or so, after a tumultuous period in the early 1990s, the Vera Court neighborhood hasn't seen much violent crime.

That changed Thursday night when a 20-year-old man was shot to death in what police said Friday might be a gang-related incident.

Madison Police Department spokesman Joel DeSpain said detectives are trying to piece together events surrounding the shooting. He said police were called to the 800 block of Vera Court shortly after 10 p.m. following a report of shots fired.

A car containing the dead 20-year-old man, who apparently was driving, was found on the south side of the 800 block of Troy Drive, DeSpain said.



He said investigators don't yet know whether the man was shot before or after he got in the car.

On Friday, investigators were combing through an apartment building at 802 Vera Court, but police did not say if the building was linked to the shooting.

A second man who was grazed by a gunshot was found in the area by police, DeSpain said. He did not require medical attention.

DeSpain said there doesn't appear to be any connection between the shooting death and another shooting that happened Monday at 3713 E. Karstens Drive, about a block from Vera Court.

In that incident, according to a search warrant filed in court Wednesday, a man was shot in the shoulder in the hallway of an apartment building by a Stoughton man who came to buy marijuana from him.

Police stopped short of saying the Vera Court shooting was gang-related.

"We know that some of the folks here are gang-affiliated," DeSpain said. "We don't know specifically if this is a gang crime. We don't know if this case is about that or not."

The shooting hasn't fazed neighborhood resident Chris Jones, a UW-Madison graduate student who lives on Camino del Sol, just around the corner from where the dead man was found.

He heard the shots Thursday night as he studied for an exam and thought they were firecrackers.

"It certainly rattles you to think that someone was murdered," Jones said. But even though he wouldn't have walked alone at night in the neighborhood before, his overall impression of the neighborhood as being pretty safe hasn't changed.

"I've never felt unsafe in my neighborhood," he said.

The homicide worries District 18 Ald. Anita Weier, who with her husband volunteers as a Reading Buddy at the Vera Court Neighborhood Center.

Long before she was elected to the City Council, she said, Vera Court changed for the better thanks to an effort to improve housing and curb crime that was more prevalent in the neighborhood during the early 1990s.

"Things have been going very well for the last several years," Weier said.

"So it's a concern if crime is starting to happen."

For Tom Solyst, director of the neighborhood center for the past 11 years, the immediate concern was figuring out how to help area children who don't understand what happened.

Many children probably know the victim or his family, Solyst said, and rumors about the shooting are flying around the neighborhood.

The center planned to bring in social workers from the children's schools to help address any questions they have about the situation during the after-school program and assure them they are safe.

"We'll have to see what happens after this because it's a big shock to the neighborhood," Solyst said.