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Giffen students help 'Keep the Peace'

Giffen Memorial Elementary School and the Albany Fire Department joined together Oct. 14 to call for an end to the violence that has been plaguing Albany's streets.

The assembly, held in the school's gym, was a formal pronouncement of peace and positivity in the wake of a shooting that occurred on the corner of Second Street and Judson Street on Oct. 9, leaving a 16-year-old critically injured.



Giffen students joined the Albany Fire Department on Oct. 14 for a 'Keep the Peace' rally at the school.

Giffen teachers Caroline Dobson, Anna Santonastaso and Jeremy Dudley were conducting home visits on the afternoon of Oct. 9 and were unable to visit two families due to the shooting and subsequent police blockage of Judson. Knowing first-hand that two Giffen students had experienced this tragedy on their block prompted the teachers to help the students express their opinions on the recent violence.

Students created two nonviolence banners at the school.

The first banner, which now is being displayed at the corner of Second Street and Judson Street, reads "Another Tragedy ... Stop the Violence." The second banner, which was presented to the Albany Fire Department, says, "Keep the Peace South End."

That banner was presented to Albany Fire Chief Robert C. Forezzi Sr. and deputy chiefs Warren Abriel, Dave Tidings and Frank Nerney. Chief Forezzi, a lifetime South End resident and former Giffen student, said it was important for children to take a stand against violence.

The banner is now being displayed at the South End Fire House on Morton Avenue and South Pearl Street, across the street from the school.

At the assembly, Mr. Dudley, a fifth-grade teacher, stressed that it was important for students to take a positive stand, saying they should "remember this day as the day they used their First Amendment right to express their voices against violence."

Giffen students mirrored this sentiment following the ceremony.

“We need to stop the violence because people are dying and getting hurt in our neighborhoods,” said Giffen sixth-grader Antonio Saunders Jr.

Students Benjamin Powell Jr. (fifth grade) and Cicero Holmes IV (sixth grade) added that the violence is provoking some children to emulate the bad behavior of older people in the community. They stressed the need for positive role models and safe environments, asserting that the city needs more community centers to keep children occupied and off the streets.