

Alfred University uses community-based forum to respond to Las Vegas tragedy

10/05/17



ALFRED, NY -- Members of the Alfred University community, though they may have not been directly impacted by the mass shooting at a Las Vegas country music festival Sunday, nonetheless have strong feelings about the senseless act of violence.

On Wednesday, students, faculty and staff were given an opportunity to respond to the tragedy by participating in a community-based art project. Titled “Far Too Long,” the project consisted of a 200-foot roll of vinyl, unfurled to allow people to write their thoughts and feelings about what is now being called the deadliest mass shooting in recent U.S. history (more than 50 killed; more than 500 injured).

“We wanted to create a continuous representation of how students feel about it, how the community feels about it,” said Dan Napolitano, chief diversity officer at Alfred University, who along with Shakima Clency, Diversity Fellow in the University’s Institute for Cultural Unity, planned and coordinated the project.

“We wanted to do something visual, something timely, and in a community-based model. It would be great if we could get this to stretch across campus.”

Shortly after 10 a.m. Wednesday, Napolitano and Clency, with help from Ren Dessart, a first-year student from Washington, PA, set up a pair of tables in front of Seidlin Hall and unrolled the first several feet of vinyl. At the beginning, scrawled in black ink, were the words ‘Far Too Long.’ “As in, this (violence) has been going on far too long,” Napolitano explained.

Napolitano asked Dessart and fellow first-year student Ting Germain of Manlius, NY, how tragedies like the one in Las Vegas impact their lives. Dessart said there’s almost a feeling that this type of event is no longer unexpected.

“No one brought it up until dinner time the next day,” Dessart said. “For most people, it was a normal day. It seems like it happens so often, you could talk about it every day. This has happened a lot in my lifetime.”

Germain said she had an aunt who was at the concert in Las Vegas when the shooting broke out. “She’s OK. She hid behind a food cart.”

“We’re kind of numb to it,” Germain continued. “I know this type of thing happens, but not in my area. I always thought I was safe, but you realize this could happen to anyone.”

Clency agreed. “It used to be you’d think this would happen just in bad neighborhoods. Now you see it happening in public places. Knowing those places are no longer safe is troubling.”

An email sent out Tuesday, and signs set up along Academic Alley, invited members of the University community to

use black markers and paint to add their thoughts. By the end of the afternoon, 50 feet of vinyl was unrolled and covered in words from approximately 60 contributors. Some samples of what was written:

“Stop saying guns aren&t the problem; they clearly are. IT&S SO OBVIOUS.”

“This will not, this CANNOT, become commonplace. WE WON&T ALLOW IT.”

“I am so sad...people are losing their lives to these senseless acts.”

“Too many innocent lives have been taken. We need 2 change. Thoughts and prayers go out to anyone who has been hurt by gun violence.”

“We need a world that makes people famous for the good we do, not the evil.”

“This country hasn&t felt like a “We” for a long time now.”

“To those lost and to those lost without those taken, life gets better with time. Never forget but try to help each other heal.”

Napolitano was pleased with the response from those who took time to participate in the project.

“This new generation of college students may be more comfortable interacting through social media - message boards, posting, liking, heart emojis, forwarding, retweeting , etc. but sometimes we need to connect in-person, face-to-face,” he said. “Our unique community-based art strives to combine both worlds still very quick, time-efficient interactions but with opportunities to engage, comfort, console and build a physical sense of community here in Alfred.”