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ALERT FEATURED

CITY OF HICKORY

5 deadly shootings, including the killing of India Rice, remain unsolved in Hickory since 2020

Sarah Johnson

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Lanora Evans holds a photo of her daughter, India Kynar Rice. Evans

Sarah C. Johnson photos, Record

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Sarah Johnson

ADVENTURE IS
CLOSER
THAN YOU THINK



Lanora Evans clutched a framed photo of her daughter, India Kynar Rice, as she spoke about the pain she has endured since her daughter's death.

Rice, 27, was shot and killed in her home on May 12, 2021. A year and seven months later, no arrests have been made in the case.

"I feel like the case wasn't handled correctly, initially," Evans said. She said there are questions that should have been asked and investigative work that should have been completed.

She said investigators have since retraced their steps.

"It's been frustrating. I get very angry because no one is talking (to the police)," Evans said. "Someone has to know."

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Rice is one of 17 people who have been shot and killed within the Hickory city limits since 2020, according to the Hickory Police Department. Many of the violent acts happened in or near the Ridgeview community. ⊗

Evans said it has been difficult to get the community's attention about her daughter's death, in part, because they have few family ties to Hickory. She said they moved to Hickory when Rice was around 10. She added that Rice tended to keep to herself.

“I don’t think the community is speaking up because to them she is just a girl who got killed,” Evans said, adding that she worries about Rice’s case being forgotten.

“The people that could say something won’t because it’s their family that did this,” she said. “It’s their nephew, their godson or their best friend’s child, so they don’t say anything.”

Evans said another reason some people won’t talk is fear of retaliation. The newly announced Hickory police chief agrees.

Hickory Police Maj. Reed Baer pointed to low or unsecured bonds as an issue causing citizens to be afraid of providing information to the police. “Ask yourself the question,” he said. “If you were seeing dangerous criminals in your community arrested and immediately released, would you give information that may lead to their arrest knowing they would be back in your community the same day?”

Victims remembered at ceremony

Rice is one of the gun-violence victims from across Catawba County who were remembered during an empowerment session for Mothers of Murdered Seeds (MOMS) on Nov. 19. The event was held at the Brown-Penn Senior Center in Hickory. Photos of each victim lined a table. In front of each frame were small candles. Family and friends lighted the candles during the ceremony.

The event was organized by Tammy Watts, whose son and nephew were killed on Mother’s Day in 2020. Xzavion “Zay” Watts, 20, and his cousin Damarion “Lil Bop” Sharpe, 16, were shot at the Save More Convenience Store on First Avenue SW on May 10, 2020. No arrests have been made in the case. ⊗

There also have been no arrests in the deaths of Michael Emmanuel Tucker Jr., Marty Lee Brown and Armstrong Seme.

Tucker, 26, was shot in his car on First Street, SE, on Dec. 8, 2021. He died 20 days later at Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte.

Brown, 59, was found dead from a gunshot wound in the living room of a home on Eighth Avenue Drive SE on Jan. 24, 2021.

Armstrong Shadrac Seme, 20, was killed at the Sunny Valley Apartments located on Third Avenue SE on Sept. 27, 2020. Seme was a bystander to the shooting of Jalen Michael-Marquis Shade. Shade was shot multiple times after he was approached by three males in dark clothes, according to Hickory police.

Shade survived the shooting. Seme was struck by several bullets as Shade was being shot, according to Hickory police.

Several of the shootings involved teenagers, both as victims and suspects. A common theme among speakers was a need for role models to keep young people out of trouble.

Newton Police Chief Vidal Sipe said that men, especially fathers, in Hickory need to step up and set good examples for the younger generation. He said moms work hard to help their children, but young men still need a father figure to help guide them in the right direction.

Michael Mayfield also spoke at the event. His brother, William Pierre Mayfield, went missing in 2014. His body was found in 2015. An autopsy determined he was shot. The Mayfield family is still looking for answers.

Sipe said he knew a few of the families in the room, including the Mayfield family. He said he couldn't imagine how these families feel knowing that someone in the community knows what happened to their loved ones but has not come forward with the information. "Somebody knows what happened to Pierre," Sipe said. "But nobody wants to say anything." ⊗

William Pierre Mayfield was last seen alive at the Total Convenience Market gas station on U.S. 70 SW at approximately 1 a.m. on Sept. 21, 2014. Hickory police said Pierre attended a party on the 900 block of South Center Street after leaving the gas station.

“If you know something, you need to say something,” Tammy Watts said. “We need to take a stand to protect each other, to support each other and to love each other.”

Anyone with information regarding any of these unsolved shooting cases is asked to contact the Hickory Police Department at 828-328-5551.

Hickory leaders respond to gun violence

Hickory Police Maj. Baer said police work to build and maintain community relationships every day.

“This comes in many forms and can be as informal as meeting with concerned citizens and victims of crime to presenting information to formal organized groups,” Baer said.

Baer said Hickory police officers held their first juvenile call-in on Nov. 17. Hickory Police Department Media and Community Services Coordinator Kristen Hart said 14 juveniles attended the meeting.

The juvenile call-in was similar to the Safe Communities Notification Call-In for adult offenders, according to Baer. The juvenile call-in focused on preventing at-risk juveniles from going down a path that leads to incarceration or worse. The adult call-ins help people on probation. The adults have the opportunity to sign up for classes that provide resources for jobs, such as creating resumes and rehearsing interview skills.

Baer said another way Hickory police are working to reduce violent crimes is by working with the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police and other professional organizations to make legislative changes directed at the statewide increase in gun violence.

City council members speak out

Councilman David Williams, whose city ward includes the Ridgeview community, voiced his concerns with gun violence in Hickory. Williams, too, said there is a need for more role models. “These young people are turning to gangs and groups that lead



them into trouble,” Williams said. “And they’re doing so because, again, they don’t have any role models or examples to show them to not turn to that lifestyle.” Williams said the city can help by supporting community efforts to mentor children. One example Williams offered is the city’s partnership with Catawba Valley Community College to provide job opportunities. Williams said people in the community need to step up and help instead of blaming city leaders or law enforcement.

“If they will use that same energy, instead of finger pointing, actually get out here in the community and try to help these young people,” Williams said. “We would have more examples and we will be able to do more things in the community.”

Hickory Mayor Hank Guess said no amount of gun violence is tolerable.

“When a tragic event happens, it gets immediate attention. Everybody talks about how terrible it is,” Guess said. “But other than that, what kind of attention does it get? ... A lot of times the burden goes to law enforcement and to police. And we certainly understand that because that’s part of their role, but we can’t expect law enforcement to solve this problem on their own.”

Guess said the city’s primary role in reducing gun violence is to ensure that officers have the equipment necessary to do their jobs. He said he is confident that Hickory police have everything they need.



By Sarah Johnson
Reporter

