

BELMONT

Honoring a fallen student

By Dan Tuohy, Globe Correspondent | September 10, 2006

As Timmie Barrows created a sign to carry in a peace rally tomorrow in memory of his best friend who was shot and killed this summer, he shook his head in frustration.

“It’s not going to make a difference,” he said.

The Belmont High School senior is a school-choice student just like Herman Taylor III, who was killed near his Boston home July 12. They had been together since fifth grade at Roxbury Prep.

“He was my right-hand man,” said Barrows, joining two dozen Belmont students last week in preparing signs and banners for tomorrow’s rally.

The death of the popular 18-year-old, who would have been a senior this year, adds a sad note to the start of the school year in Belmont. Students are still trying to make sense of it.

“Hopefully it will make a difference,” said Charissa McMullen, a fellow senior.

Kara Allen, a senior who was Taylor’s girlfriend, said Boston Mayor Thomas Menino has to make the city a safer place. “I’d tell him to open his eyes,” she said.

“But what can they do?” McMullen countered.

“Nothing,” said Barrows, who is to be one of the guest speakers at the rally. He has yet to find the words to describe the loss.

As school started last week, officials provided grief counseling to students and faculty. And they are helping Taylor’s family promote the rally and march tomorrow in Dorchester. The idea is to redirect the emotions and make a positive statement, said Jana McCarthy, an English teacher and adviser to Taylor, a school-choice student.

“We need to ask ourselves: How can we help our students empower themselves in the face of this loss?” she said. “My students are angry. I’m angry. I don’t think you can have this event and not feel anger.”

Marisa Coleman, the older of Taylor’s two sisters, envisions the community coming together to honor a young man and to combat crime by getting involved. She, too, is focusing on the positive. She recalled her brother’s love of basketball, family, and friends, and working with younger children.

But two months after his death, she said the loss is still hard to believe. “There’s a lot of mixed emotions,” she said. “It’s not only anger but disbelief. You’re also very disappointed.”

Amid the shock and sadness at school and in the community, McCarthy hopes the rally serves as an outlet, a ritual closing. To that end, students last week congregated at the school to make banners and signs to memorialize their peer.

Recalling Taylor's ability to connect with young people and adults alike, McCarthy is urging students to work through their grief by committing themselves to education, to community, and to family and friends.

``Honor Herman by doing things for themselves, by reaching out to others," she said.

On the web site created to honor Taylor, some of his fellow students pledged to do just that.

``It is going to be a long year without you," writes Danielle Shearer-Coren. ``I wish you were here with me to finish off our journey, but I am going to do it for you, knowing that you are watching over me."

Taylor's family has established the Herman Taylor III Memorial Fund, or HT3 Fund, to raise money to help youth go to sports camps or similar extracurricular activities. Taylor played basketball and baseball at Belmont High, and he was eager to pursue an education at a Division 1 college, according to his sister. The website is www.ht3fund.org.

Tomorrow's rally is scheduled to begin at 5 p.m. at Freedom House at 14 Crawford St. in Dorchester. The march follows at 6, and a closing vigil is scheduled for 8 at Franklin Park Playstead.

In connection with the fifth anniversary of 9/11, the event also will pay homage to the victims of the terrorist attacks, honor U S soldiers, and promote peace.

Guest speakers will include families from Greater Boston who have lost loved ones to violence, peace advocates, and civic leaders. Partners in the event include Belmont Against Racism, Dorchester People for Peace, PeaceBoston, and Social Capital Inc . , Dorchester. Coleman works for Social Capital Inc., a non profit group dedicated to building and strengthening communities.

``We need to focus on taking back our neighborhoods," Coleman said. She spoke of a village model, in which all members of a community value the health and well-being of a child.

Lynn Duval Luse, a spokeswoman for the memorial fund, said Taylor's death should serve as a wake-up call because he was doing all the rights things to stay out of trouble. He worked hard on and off the basketball court, inside and outside of school, and his parents and sisters were active in his life each day, she said.

``We have to help this young man's life mean something," said Luse. ``We were blown away. We didn't know how many lives he touched."

Authorities have not made any arrests in connection with Taylor's death. The case is still under investigation, said Officer John Boyle, a spokesman for the Boston Police Department.

Luse said Massachusetts is fighting a battle against violence that knows no social, cultural, or geographic boundaries.

The Taylor and Coleman family, in a message on the memorial fund website, also urge people who have not personally encountered such violence and loss to work against being desensitized as people are killed in Boston.

Like Marisa Coleman's village model, the best response is a citywide response, said McCarthy, who plans to rally and march alongside Taylor's family, friends, and fellow students.

She said she is more reflective and eager to reach out because of her former student's life and death.

“I've never experienced anything like this,” she said. “He's changed my life.”