

‘We feel the love from the community’: A day of remembrance 7 years after Parkland shooting

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CORAL SPRINGS — In the past, Glen Lerner was more comfortable being a bystander at community remembrance events, even though he was hurting, too. This year, he finally pulled up a chair and painted a rock at a table to honor Coach Aaron Feis, known for his kindness and generosity.

Lerner participated in the [annual “Forever in Our Hearts”](#) commemoration at Eagles’ Haven Wellness Center in Coral Springs. The community came together at events Friday to warmly remember the 17 people who died in the Feb. 14, 2018, shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland.



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Peter Wang's family gathers during a ceremony at Eagles' Haven Wellness Center on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025. The gathering is in honor of the 17 students and staff who died seven years ago in the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Valentine's Day in Parkland. (Mike Stocker/South Florida Sun Sentinel)

Lerner in past years had hung back during memorial events. "It was easier to watch," he said Friday. "Maybe it was a way of coping." Now, he said, "being present is different."

The event at Eagles' Haven Wellness Center offered something for each person to remember.

There was rock painting to represent Aaron Feis' kindness and generosity.

They had temporary tattoos to symbolize Alyssa Alhadeff's jersey.

A baby Yoda was built out of Legos for Martin Duque Anguiano's love of "Star Wars."

They planted a Forget Me Not for Helena Ramsay's love of gardening.

They painted for Gina Montalto.

There were peanut M&M's to honor Chris Hixon, Chick-fil-A nuggets for Luke Hoyer (with seven kinds of sauce), a crepe for Alex Schachter, and pizza for Nicholas Dworet.

They hugged a therapy pony for Meadow Pollack and a therapy dog for Jaime Guttenberg.

Got in some fitness for teacher Scott Beigel.

Watched Irish dance for Cara Loughran.

There were drums for Joaquin Oliver.

The national Anthem was sung by a church member, remembering Carmen Schentrup's love of chorus.

They watched the JROTC for Alaina Petty and Peter Wang.

At the candle lighting, families told stories of the winning soccer star and the gentle boy who put other people first. There was also the shared pain of the anticipated Valentine's Day call to a mom from a teacher that never came, the Mass for Ash Wednesday that wasn't attended after school. But there were smiles, too.

And tears. Lots of tears.

During the candle-lighting ceremony, Gillian Kramer, 24, of Coral Springs, wept.

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She was a 12th-grader the day of the shooting, in that 1200 building, in math class. Her brother was across the hall.

On Friday, Kramer held her mom close as each family lit a candle. They came to support the families, and for each other, too.

"You don't know what to do for your kids," said Kramer's mother, Lisa Nolasco. She remembers ticking off options: "Therapy, equine therapy."

"Seven years later, my son is (only now) wanting to talk about it."

It's been seven years since the school shooting, shattering families and the community. But the community is resolute to never forget.

Many families have turned their energies into public office, charities and foundations, such as Orange Ribbons for Jaime (named for Jaime Guttenberg) and the Gina Rose Montalto Memorial Foundation, and school safety initiatives.

Among those attending the event was Max Schachter, the father of Alex Schachter, who was in the school's band. Max Schachter has championed for school safety with the creation of the [School Safety Dashboard](#), so parents have access to safety data. He's still working to get more states to join in.

"We feel the love from the community," he said Friday. "Seven years ago created a hole in my life. We don't go on, we move forward."

Rebecca Jarquin, director of Eagles' Haven, said seven of the victims' families were in attendance this year. The community is here, and they're not alone, she said.

"It's so unimaginable that seven years later it still feels like yesterday," she said.

On Friday, Gina's father, Tony Montalto, received a welcome surprise.

A young woman approached him at the event. He'd never met her before.

She began telling him about the time she was a new student at Stoneman Douglas — and of course, Gina was nice to her. Gina was in her study hall, and befriended her and made her feel welcome.

That's the Gina that Montalto wants everyone to remember.

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