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Seven years after Parkland shooting, South Florida keeps promise to 'never forget'

WLRN Public Media | By [Natalie La Roche Pietri](#)

Published February 14, 2025 at 9:10 PM EST

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WLRN / Carlton Gillespie

Flowers in honor of the victims killed seven years ago adorned the school's marquee.

A poignant gallery of 17 large black-and-white portraits represented a powerful message for those gathered late Friday during a vigil at Pines Trail Park to remember the victims killed seven years ago at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

The portraits are part of the "Inside Out MSD" art project, which is designed "to transform messages of personal identity into works of public art."

On this night, the portraits served as a way to keep the innocent victims' memory alive in the wake of the horrific tragedy for not only South Florida, but the nation.



WLRN / Carlton Gillespie

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"Sometimes people say 'never forget,' but it really does happen, people do forget, and that's [an] unfortunate human reaction to things," said Mike Moser, chairman of the Parkland 17 Memorial Foundation. "But it is nice to see the Parkland and Coral Springs communities still coming together for this. They have promised to never forget — and they have upheld that promise."

At the park's amphitheater, a slideshow set to somber music displayed pictures of the 17 students, teachers and coaches killed in the mass shooting — Alyssa Alhadeff, Scott Beigel, Martin Duque, Nicholas Dworet, Aaron Feis, Jaime Guttenberg, Chris Hixon, Luke Hoyer, Cara Loughran, Gina Montalto, Joaquin Oliver, Alaina Petty, Meadow Pollack, Helena Ramsay, Alex Schachter, Carmen Schentrup and Peter Wang.

Earlier in the day, a commemoration was held at Eagles' Haven, a wellness center devoted to helping those affected by the tragedy.

"It's obviously an extremely emotionally charged day," said Rebecca Jarquin, director of Eagles Haven. "However, I feel like it's critical that we continue to commemorate these 17 lives."

Victims' families lit candles at the early-afternoon event, and shared stories of their loved ones. They then released 17 doves, which circled the parking lot together in flight for several minutes before flying away into a deep blue South Florida sky.



Carlton Gilliespie

Family members of the 17 Parkland shooting victims released doves at Eagles' Haven in a symbolic tribute to their loved ones.

At the sunset vigil, glow-sticks were distributed to the dozens of people gathered at the park less than two miles from the school where the shooting happened. "Let us be the light the world so desperately needs," one of the speakers said on stage right before inviting everyone to crack their glow sticks. Throughout the field, neon lights flicked on.

The shooting was a tragically unifying moment in Broward County for all people – no matter how old or how young.

"I'm out here today to just help remember those who are gone and to just help bring awareness," said Breanna McWilliams, a junior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

McWilliams said she was in fifth grade in an elementary school in Parkland in 2018, the year of the shooting, and learned of what happened after arriving home from school.

As the vigil came to a close, with people making their way to their cars, the lights hanging over the powerful art exhibit shone on, illuminating the faces of the students and staff whose privilege to age was brutally stripped from them.

WLRN Broward reporter Carlton Gillespie contributed reporting to this story.



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[See stories by Natalie La Roche Pietri](#)

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