

# HORROR IN PALATINE

## A new fear for parents

### Security where their teens work added to list

By JIM ALLEN  
Daily Herald Staff Writer

For suburban teen-agers looking for extra cash, taking a part-time job often has been a practical choice. For teens, the question may have been whether the money would be for college or a car. For parents, the question more likely was whether there would be enough time for homework and family activities.

But with the slayings of seven workers — including two high school students — at the Brown's Chicken & Pasta restaurant in Palatine, another question could be asked:

Is it worth the risk?

"I really don't want to work, after what's happened, at a fast-food place or anything," said Meghan Corman, a 15-year-old schoolmate of victim Michael Castro.

Corman said she had been working at a restaurant but that now she doesn't want to return. Standing nearby, her father, Tom, responded, "That's fine. ... She did work for a while at a restaurant, but not a fast-food place. And I was always concerned because, you know, she's my only daughter."

Ronald Powell, president of the 40,000-member United Food & Commercial Workers Local 881, said parents throughout the suburbs are likely to feel the same way. The tragedy in Palatine has shattered any feelings of security, he said.

"When I heard about that, talk about chills going up your spine," Powell said.

"I think there's certainly going to be some apprehension, not only on the part of the teen-agers, but also on the part of the parents, for at least a period of time," Powell predicted.

Meanwhile, police investigators said they could do little to reassure parents and teens.

Citing the delicacy of the investigation, Palatine police declined to say whether they had a suspect in custody or whether the grisly crime may have been committed by more than one gunman.

Palatine Deputy Police Chief Walt Gasior, at a Sunday afternoon news conference, declined to comment on such issues. "I'm sensitive to their concerns, but it would be inappropriate at this stage of the investigation."

## Community rallies to aid victims' families

By SANDRA DELRE  
and DEEDRA LAWHEAD  
Daily Herald Staff Writers

Friends and strangers reached out Sunday to the families of seven people slaughtered at the Brown's Chicken & Pasta restaurant, at least two of whom now face financial hardships to compound their loss.

Victim Thomas E. Mennes, 32, did not have life insurance and his step-mother, Frances Mennes, said it's going to be difficult to raise money for the funeral, which will cost about \$4,000. Thomas' father is ill and his twin brother, Jerome, is devastated by the death of his brother, she said.

"We'll just live day-by-day until the funeral," she said. "We'll pray for him and the other victims. There's not much more we can do."

Palatine Village President Rita Mullins said the community has "rallied together" to establish a fund at the Suburban National Bank in Palatine to help victims' families pay for funeral expenses.

"There have been phone calls after phone calls from people in the community saying, 'What can I do? Can I give money? Can I provide food for the families?'" said Palatine Village President Rita Mullins.

The family of Guadeloupe Maldonado, 47, another Brown's employ-



Palatine police look for clues in a grisly murder case that has left some area teens leery of taking jobs.

Daily Herald Photo/Mark Welsh

Although the killings prompted fears about teens returning to their jobs, there also were indications the tragedy could lead to changes in security procedures throughout the village.

Palatine Village President Rita Mullins announced that police would beef up patrols of local businesses. And she said the Palatine Chamber of Commerce will sponsor a meeting between police and business officials to discuss security.

A chilling aspect of the case is that the murderer may have entered the Brown's restaurant through a back door that was left unlocked — a common practice at such restaurants.

Powell, whose union is the largest of its kind in the nation, noted that the majority of his members work in grocery stores, which have a history

of taking precautions like locking back doors and keeping limited amounts of cash accessible.

"Workplace security is obviously something we like to see. It's certainly high on our list," Powell said.

In the aftermath of Friday's killings, the issue apparently is high on everyone's list.

In Arlington Heights, about five business owners called police over the weekend, asking for patrols at closing time, said police Sgt. Peter Kinsey.

"I had to explain to them that they all close at different hours, and we only have so many officers," Kinsey said.

But at the same time, restaurateurs with fears should consider taking steps like hiring private security officers, he said.

## Reflections on the tragedy

Nothing of this magnitude has ever happened. I'm sick — I don't like to eat, I don't like to sleep.

— Palatine resident Roger Kolze

I'd like to have just 30 minutes with him ... but it's not up to me, it's up to the police and God to decide what happens.



— Tony Esparza, a friend of Rico Solis, angry at whoever committed the massacre.

There's a lack of respect for life in this world today and I think it's all family-based. Families aren't together anymore like they were.

— Tom Corman, father of a young teen-ager who said she's afraid to go back to work now.

They thought this was something that would prove positive.

— Cathy Allen, talking about Dick and Lynn Ehlenfeldt's decision to go into the restaurant business a year ago

They should hang whoever did this. Literally hang them, or maybe kill them the way they killed these people.

— Pam Horwath, of Arlington Heights, a bystander at the crime scene with her husband and three sons.

We were called the Death Battalion, and our job was to die and we did that very well. Is this 'Nam all over again? This just gets my gut.

— Fred Brown, a veteran and a member of the Brown's Chicken founding family.

We always talked about how time flies. Everything in high school went so fast for us that we just wanted it to slow down so we could enjoy it more.

— Jaybee Anama, 16, a close friend of Mike Castro.

I want to apologize to some of the reporters who called me at home last night. I just didn't know what answers to give ... if I was rude I didn't mean to be.



— Frank Portillo, president of Brown's Chicken & Pasta

We're thinking of them (the other victims' families). We're not thinking of ourselves. They are certainly in our prayers.

— Ann Teichow, Richard Ehlenfeldt's sister, speaking on behalf of the family



Palatine High School principal Nancy Robb, and counselor Marc Denny talk with reporters at the school. Daily Herald Photo/Daniel White

## Grieving students relieve pain by talking to counselors, peers

By TODD NATENBERG  
Daily Herald Staff Writer

The stinging news that her close friend and classmate, Michael C. Castro, had been murdered left Catherine Ernst devastated.

"My knees gave out and I just started crying real hard," the 17-year-old Palatine High School junior recalled. "I just all of a sudden felt real weak."

The deaths of Castro and Rico Solis, another Palatine High School student, and five other people murdered Friday at Brown's Chicken & Pasta in Palatine, has shaken the community. It caused pain that many people tried to ease Sunday by talking with counselors and leaning on each other.

Ernst was one of about 20 students and parents who came together at the high school to cry, search for answers or just to talk.

"Yeah, you're going to cry and get emotional," Ernst said after meeting with the counselors. "But you help yourself out by getting it out in the open."

Catherine's 14-year-old sister Jessica, a freshman, also knew Solis and Castro. She, too, sought help in dealing with the tragedy.

"I had met both of them and they both were really nice people," Jessica said. "They were the nicest kids. I can't believe it happened."

Counselors met with students, parents and relatives of the victims to try to sort through their feelings. Friend of Castro and Solis remembered the good times.

"A lot of kids would be talking

about, 'Why would somebody do this? What would be the possible motive?'" said Kathy Pozzi, a high school social worker. "They would run over five or six things in their mind. Then they come to no conclusion."

Pozzi said the students' feelings were mostly "stunned shock and sadness."

Fred Brown, son of one of the original Brown's founders, also went to the school to offer his condolences.

"I don't want to let the kids down. That's my name on all those signs," said Brown, who had made string necklaces of small crosses and donated them to the school.

Despite the tragedy, school will be open today. As the school's 2,000 students return this morning, principal Nancy Robb will use the public address system to talk to students.

"The school is really a safe place for our students," Robb said. "I feel by coming here, that they will be able to process those things they need to process."

While nothing of this magnitude has ever struck the high school, counselors, ironically, already had assembled a crisis team after a tragedy last week. Disabled student, Timothy Cundiff, died.

"Tim's death hit the special education students hard," said senior Michelle Parke, the editor-in-chief of the school newspaper, The Cutlass. "But Tim had respiratory problems and went into a coma. That's easier to understand than this."

Daily Herald Staff Writer Laura Janota contributed to this report

## School becomes 'haven' for outpouring of grief

By BURT CONSTABLE  
Daily Herald Staff Writer

The tragic news that would rock Palatine High School reached Principal Nancy N. Robb early Saturday while she was still in bed.

"My husband got me up. It was a little before 7 o'clock. He heard it on CNN, on the radio," Robb remembered. "He got me up right away because he knew a lot of our students work at Brown's Chicken."

She immediately telephoned the school's police consultant to see if, or rather "how many," students of hers were among the seven victims of the slayings at the fast-food restaurant.

That answer wouldn't come for another 15 hours. But the barrage of telephone calls started immediately.

"People calling to let me know there had been a tragedy; staff members calling to offer help if there was anything to do," Robb said. "As soon as you got off the phone, you got on the phone. As soon as someone got up and awake, they would call. 'Did you know?'"

"My parents called from Florida," the principal said.

By 10 a.m., she was at the school, meeting with counselors, talking to her superintendent and police and making plans to deal with the trage-

dy. The group pondered canceling that evening's basketball games and set a 4 p.m. deadline for the decision. The deadline came and went with no official confirmation of the rumored deaths of two Palatine High School students.

Playing the games gave worried students, parents and school officials an emotional outlet, a place to come together and talk. More than a half-dozen counselors were on hand to talk to kids and adults.

"The school is really a safe place for students, kind of a haven," Robb said. "I think that was more important than sitting at home in front of the TV, waiting to hear the news."

The plans for dealing with the grief already were in place when police confirmed the names of the dead, including the two students.

"I was on the phone with police getting verification as the game was ending," Robb said.

Now comes the hardest part. "In a school of nearly 2,000 students, it's difficult to think of it as a family, but it is," Robb says. "It's been an amazing experience. I can't relate in words. It impacts everyone in the community, but it has special impact here. We all go to the Brown's restaurant. Our kids work there. It really hits home."

## Restaurant's fate remains undetermined

By KERI WYATT KENT  
Daily Herald Staff Writer

The fate of the green and white building at the corner of North-west Highway and Smith Road in Palatine remains shrouded, like so many other details of the mass murder that occurred there late Friday night.

Frank Portillo, owner of Oak Brook-based Brown's Chicken & Pasta Inc., said he's not sure what the company will do with the restaurant in Palatine.

"We don't know at this point," he said. "We're taking this not even one day at a time, but one hour at a time."

The bodies of the couple that owned the franchise, and five employees, were found early Saturday morning in the restaurant. They had been shot to death and stashed in the two large coolers in the rear of the restaurant.

Ann Teichow, sister of Richard Ehlenfeldt, the owner of the restaurant, said Sunday that the family has not made any decisions about the business and its future.

No arrests or charges have been made in the case. Meanwhile, police cars and barricades surround the building, located a few hundred yards from a strip shopping center.

"In 40 years, there has never

been an incident like this," Portillo said. Frank Portillo is the brother of Dick Portillo, who owns the Portillo's Hot Dogs chain. The businesses are separate.

Other fast-food restaurants hit by violent tragedy have reacted in various ways. In 1984, when a gunman opened fire in a San Ysidro, Calif., McDonald's restaurant, killing 20 people, the company razed the eatery soon after the incident.

In 1991, a gunman drove his car through the front window of Luby's Cafeteria in Killeen, Texas, and opened fire, killing 22 people and injured others before killing himself.

## 'Palatine Cares' fund to aid victims' families

A Palatine bank will establish a special fund to accommodate those who wish to offer financial assistance to the families of the seven Brown's Chicken & Pasta employees who were murdered Friday.

"There have been phone calls after phone calls from people in the community saying 'What can I do? Can I give money? Can I provide food for the families? Where can I go,'" said Palatine Village President Rita Mullins.

The Suburban National Bank of Palatine will set up the fund, tenta-

tively named "Palatine Cares," said Robert Knapstein, vice president of business development. Donors can send offerings to the bank, 50 N. Brockway St.

"The bank volunteered to act as a conduit for any funds that people wished to contribute for the families involved," Knapstein said. "Suburban (National Bank) is willing to cooperate as much as we can because of our commitment to the community. We hurt as much as the rest of the community."