

This section is recyclable Saturday, December 14, 1991 Austin American-Statesman B3

## Slain teen-agers live on in memories

Continued from B1

John Bayh, a family friend of the Hechters, says they would have come straight home that night, as was their practice, unless they made one detour.

It wasn't unusual for the girls to drop by Lanier High School's off-campus site on North Lamar Boulevard to say goodnight to their pet projects.

The animals were Future Farmers of America projects, just one activity the girls excelled in. Their love of animals, and interest in FFA, was a common bond.

Elisa had "always been really nuts about animals," said her father, James Thomas. For three years, Elisa kept four corymba in a duplex in her bedroom. There were the pair of white rats. They were ugly, her father said, "but she loved them."

Elisa was a sophomore at McCulloch High School when she expressed an interest in transferring to Lanier, which had an FFA chapter. Last year, she made the transfer and met a young man named Lucille.

Lucille made action at the Travis County Junior Livestock Show last spring. Elisa was proud, said her father. "She said this was the first project that she had carried off the way through."

FFA was the best thing that came along in her life. She wanted to be a veterinarian. "I think she would have made it."

Although Amy was younger, an eighth-grader at Burnet Middle School, her older brother, Shawn, had been active in Lanier's FFA chapter before graduating last year.

Amy, the popular kid sister, was still active in the FFA chapter and had become a junior member of the Lanier chapter, where she served as vice president.

Raising animals had taught the girls responsibility. Morning and night, every day, the teen-agers made trips to the FFA pens to feed, water and walk their animals.

For the older girls, their jobs at the yogurt shop had taught them another lesson — the value of working for a dollar. Elisa had worked a car and was able to reach her goal by working the part-time job. It wasn't a fancy car, or a new one, but she was happy with it, her father said.

On her Christmas wish list, she asked for a car.

"She always talked about her little car," said her father. "I think she would have been able to reach her goal by working the part-time job. It wasn't a fancy car, or a new one, but she was happy with it, her father said."

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## Silent vigil at murder site honors teens

By Kimberley Garcia and David Matulis  
Austin American-Statesman Staff

The noise stopped, but the tears did not.

At a silent vigil late Friday at the site where four teen-agers were killed Dec. 6, Austinites came to grieve.

For some, the vigil in front of the I Can't Believe It's Yogurt shop on West Anderson Lane marked the continuation of a healing period. For others, the pain was still too difficult to bear.

"I'm just confused about my feelings. Everybody's all jumbled up," said one teen-ager, a friend of one of the victims who asked not to be identified.

The young man was among about 150 people who gathered to mourn the deaths of Amy Ayers, 15; Sarah Hechters, 15; her sister, Jennifer, 17; and Elisa Thomas, 17.

At 11 p.m., mourners at the vigil observed 60 seconds of silence to commemorate the four teens, who are thought to have died around 11 p.m. on Dec. 6.

The kids had made it to the yogurt shop, said Thomas. "She said this was the first project that she had carried off the way through."

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"When a lot of people get together to at least acknowledge the death, it helps."

Donations of food continued to rise Friday, topping \$30,000, as Austin police said there were no more developments in finding who killed the teen-agers last week.

Members of the Lanier High School Future Farmers of America will be at area malls today. Anyone willing to help in other areas or wanting to donate office supplies for the effort can go to 818 E. 3rd St., the Child Inc. building.

The office will be open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. today.

The slayings have outraged the public and brought out pouring of help.

The mayor of I Can't Believe It's Yogurt is offering a \$25,000 reward and reward donations may be sent to Project Help Us, Black Ops, Capital Plaza Branch, 1407 N. Interpersonal Highway, Austin, 78723.

Round Rock businessman Ronald Patton is collecting pledges for a reward fund. Write Patton at 4024 W. Taylor Ave., No. 145, Round Rock, 78664.

Several other funds that will go to scholarships or other projects in memory of the slain students include:

• The Lanier FFA Chapter, Burnet Fund, P.O. Box 181198, Austin, 78718.

• The Jennifer and Sarah Hechters Memorial FFA Scholarship Fund, Travis County, P.O. Box 9708, Austin, 78766. Donations also may be dropped off at TeamBank and NCNB branches.

■ The Amy Ayers Memorial Fund, Burnet Middle School, 1401 Highway Drive, Austin, 78704.

Portions of autopsy reports on the teen-agers were released Friday, but the cause of the deaths and other information remained protected by the courts. Police have said all the victims were shot in the back of the head.

"In an ongoing investigation, state law allows some information to be confidential that would jeopardize the investigation," said Steve McCleary, an assistant district attorney for Travis County.

The autopsy report revealed facts about the crime that would remain confidential right now, McCleary said. "These autopsy reports did not reveal anything dramatically new or different that wasn't already known. What were removed were details."

Information released included:

■ No drugs or alcohol were found in toxicology tests of the four teens.

■ The fire was so intense the death of one victim was partially burned away.

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For the girls, the slayings were down on all victims. No results were given. "The police have said that if there was such an attack."

In their respective 15 and 17 years, those two probably packed in more living than a lot of people do in a lifetime.

The four girls were inseparable. Bayh said. "You couldn't see one without seeing the rest of them. They loved each other. They loved working at the yogurt shop together. They played together; when it came down to it, they died together."

The girls' friend, Amber, said it has been a difficult week for classmates. She wrote a poem about their loss, and cried when she read it aloud.

"We miss them all with our heart and soul. We hated to see them go. God has taken them under His wing. For they are at peace and the angels will sing."

"As time goes on the pain will fade. Loving memories and happy times are what we come back to through the long days. As life moves on as we know it will. For Jennifer, Sarah, Elisa and Amy. Our memory lives on and we love you all."



Lucy Burton, left, and Whitney Waller are bundled up to try to make a snow sculpture at Dougherty Arts Center.

## Snow treat is good reason to haul out winter wraps

By Scott W. Wright  
Austin American-Statesman Staff

It may be the only white Christmas that Austin gets this year. But the first snowflakes of the season didn't come from the North Pole, it came courtesy of a local ice company.

About 50 children from five elementary schools, many of whom had never seen snow, romped in simulated snow — actually clipped ice — Friday as light drizzle gradually melted their fun away.

The kids, decked out in winter coats, hats and mittens, had other ideas.

"I like throwing it in my dad's face and putting it down his shirt," said 5-year-old Christopher Thomas. "Ten-year-old Alexis Morrison, too, said 'throwing snowballs at each other' was more fun than making a sculpture."

The frosty treat was a reward from the staff at the Dougherty Arts Center, a city-run fine arts facility where children ages 6 to 10 are offered creative drama, art lessons and recreational games.

The children recently participated in a production of "The Gift of the Magi" at the O. Henry

Museum. The children who will appear in a local television station's holiday program, and some served as extras in last year's filming of "Hard Promises," a movie starring Sissy Spacek.

But on Friday, all the kids could think about was snow — and throwing snowballs. James Gonzalez, the center's youth coordinator, had planned to have the children craft an ice sculpture.

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## Fort Worth facility accredited

Continued from B1

Advocacy, Inc., a party in the class action lawsuit.

"It is surprising they got the (council's) accreditation based on the fact they lost their Medicaid," Corbett said.

Officials of MHMR hope the council's approval will bolster their appeal of the Medicaid funding cutoff at Fort Worth State School.

Medicaid inspectors returned to the institution Friday to begin reviewing whether Medicaid should be restored.

The federal government stopped payments of \$29,000 per day to Texas last Saturday because health inspectors found continued injuries to residents of Fort Worth State School. So far, Texas has lost \$236,000, and stands to lose \$157 million a year if health and safety violations are not corrected.

A confidential federal court report obtained this week concluded that there are severe problems in medical services at Fort Worth State School. The report cited failures to provide exams by physicians, failure to fully investigate sexual abuse and failure to detect life-threatening illness.

It is not known whether the council's survey report had the same court report. They could not be reached for comment.

Fifteen Texas disability rights groups this week called for the closure of Fort Worth State School because of its continued problems.

A governor's task force is studying which, if any, state schools should be closed.

Leigh Remick, lead lawyer for the class action lawsuit, said the group's standards are stringent. "Therefore, to be in substantial compliance with those standards is quite a feat," she said in a statement distributed by MHMR.

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