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Slain teens' stepfather says city's grief helped families

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helped us."

But these past three weeks have been hell for Suraci and his wife, Barbara, who lost their only children.

A constant stream of rumors has been particularly unsettling, said Suraci, who blasted "sickos" and "glory-seekers" who are wasting police time with false tips and innuendo.

"There were so many rumors flying around I was going crazy," he said.

Memories of his daughters come unbidden, though it's still too soon to recount most of them. One story, however, illustrates the fine person his oldest girl was, Suraci said.

A few weeks before the murders, Jennifer Harbison served Gov. Ann Richards at the yogurt shop, he said.

"Jennifer came home that night and talked with her mother, as she often did. She was a lovely, lovely child. She and her mother were very close.

"She beamed, she laughed, and her mother asked, 'Did you charge her?' And she said, 'No. But I charged the friend who was with her.'"

> "There were so many rumors flying around I was going crazy."
> — Frank Suraci

Police have no suspects in the slaying, and an intensive investigation continues. Authorities say more than one person was involved and appealed last week for accomplices to turn in the shooter.

The yogurt shop remains closed, and the company has removed the letters spelling I Can't Believe It's Yogurt! from the building.

Reward money, $25,000 donated by the yogurt company, has swelled to $36,000 as local companies responded with contributions of their own.

Suraci keeps a close eye on the progress, but other thoughts intrude.

"You have to understand, I no longer have children," he said. "I only have my grief to deal with."

City Council far from agreement on Barnett's future, mayor says

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protected by four council members. I guess she could probably misappropriate funds and still enjoy the support of four council members. That became apparent."

Todd responded by saying that "nothing could be further from the truth."

He added: "The issue of the city manager comes up every single year and that's the appropriate time to discuss those issues. I'm not saying that action can't be taken mid-year, but it would certainly have to be overwhelming and convincing to a majority of the council members."

Barnett, who was not invited to Monday's closed-door session, came under council scrutiny last week after Council Member Louise Epstein accused her of directing Lessard to sabotage Federal Aviation Administration funding of an airport master plan, deceiving the council about the results of an internal investigation and then attempting to cover it up.

The allegations surfaced after Epstein learned about a Nov. 1 meeting between city and FAA officials during which she said Lessard defamed her. She points to confidential memos that she said support her argument.

Mayor Bruce Todd says the council should be 'united in its actions as much as humanly possible.'

Lessard, she said, accused her of giving a political payback when she pushed for the selection of KPMG Peat Marwick as the Bergstrom airport master plan consultant. KPMG was not the first choice of a city staff committee, of which Lessard was a participant.

After completing an internal investigation, Barnett said Lessard did not accuse Epstein of making a political payoff, but instead informed FAA officials of a public perception that he believed existed.

Despite the two sessions, the discussion is far from over.

Barnett's annual evaluation has been scheduled for early February.

And, council members even disagree as to why that time was chosen. Epstein said the council moved it up from its traditional March date, while Todd and Barnett said Barnett asked for it to be expedited even before the recent flap.

Regardless, Epstein said, "I'm comfortable that in February when the council takes a look at the entire performance that we will do what is in the best interest of the city.

"There is no question in my mind and in many of the council members' minds that this was very serious, especially since it involved a federal agency, especially since the council had documentation," she said. "But one point made by one council member is that this body does not need any documentation in order to exchange one city manager for another, so I think that's a point well taken."

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