Silently remembering Oregon victims

San Diego colleges beef up security following latest shooting

By Gary Warth /staff/gary-warth/ | 5:28 p.m. Oct. 8, 2015

About 200 students, faculty and staff members form a circle around San Diego City College President Anthony Beebe on Thursday during a moment of silence to remember community college students killed in a shooting in Oregon last week. Similar observances were held nationwide. Gary Warth

Community college students, faculty and staff members throughout the nation observed a moment of silence for the victims of last week's shooting at an Oregon campus, and at least two local schools are beefing up security on campus in light of the attack.

San Diego — San Diego City College will hire two more police officers to patrol the campus, bringing the number of armed officers to 11, and will introduce a new unarmed student patrol next month. Mesa College, in the same district as City, also is introducing a student patrol.

"We learn from things that happen," said Constance Carroll, chancellor of the San Diego Community College District. "A smart organization is one that takes a good hard look at itself and takes extra steps to enhance and improve security."

The American Association of Community Colleges coordinated the nationwide observation, giving schools only a day to get the word out.

At City College, President Anthony Beebe said he was stunned by the 200 students who arrived at Gorton Quad to link arms and observe five minutes of silence.
"Having everyone show up like they did is a great tribute to the caring that we have at City College and the quality of students that we have and their spirit and value system," he said.

Many students held signs with the Twitter hash tag #IAmUCC as a show of solidarity with Umpqua Community College, the Roseburg, Oregon school where Chris Harper-Mercer killed nine people Oct. 1 before taking his own life.

Beebe and Carroll said the ceremony was intended to show support for Umpqua College while also assuring their own students that they are focused on keeping local campuses safe.

The district has technicians out checking the blue-lighted security stations that have speakers directly connected to dispatchers, said Carroll, who called on everyone to be alert of any threats.

"Every individual in 21st Century America needs to take responsibility for his or her security, because the phenomenon of the active shooter is probably here for a long time," she said.

Beebe, who called the shooter a coward in his address to students, has a personal connection with Umpqua, where 40 years ago he worked as a firefighter stationed about a mile from the college.

"We went to the campus all the time," he said. "We did pre-fire surveys there and walked the campus to make sure we knew all the buildings. I'm very familiar with the campus, the college, the community there."

Beebe phoned people he still knows in the community after the shooting and said he will send photos of the City College ceremony to Umpqua Community College to show that others are thinking of them.

"I think that's the best anyone can do this far away," he said.

All community colleges in the county participated in similar ceremonies Thursday, either through assemblies or campuswide moments of silence at 11 a.m.

Coincidentally, Thursday was the fifth anniversary of a shooting at Kelly School in Carlsbad that left two students wounded.

At Southwestern College, spokeswoman Lilian Leopold said the observation coincided with a previously scheduled assembly and included comments from the district's Police Chief Michael Cash, who talked about campus security.

At MiraCosta College, interim public relations director Rita Soza said district police officers increased their presence on campus following the shooting, with some visiting classrooms to talk about security at the request of faculty members.

At Palomar College, interim Superintendent Adrian Gonzales sent a campuswide message Wednesday announcing the planned moment of silence.

"Tragically, these types of events are becoming far too frequent in educational facilities across the nation," he wrote.

Carroll, who linked arms with others at the City College ceremony, said she decided two days ago to add two more armed officers to the downtown campus. The district already has 60 security personnel and 40 sworn, armed officers.

Carroll said no additional officers are planned for Mesa or Miramar colleges in the San Diego district.

Beebe said a new security measure would launch next month with the Knight Patrol. Two paid, trained students will patrol the campus, and two more would be added each semester until the patrol reaches 20, he said.

Carroll said a similar patrol is planned at Mesa College.

© Copyright 2015 The San Diego Union-Tribune. All rights reserved.