

'Someone has got to solve these homicides'



Clint Keller | The Journal Gazette

Denise Tadeo holds a photo of her son, Adam Tadeo, who was slain March 25. Adam Tadeo and another Fort Wayne man, De'Anthony Lewis, were found shot in a Chevrolet Impala on the city's south side.

Police file charges in 4 of 21 killings in '09

HOLLY ABRAMS
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Denise Tadeo admits her son made some wrong choices.

She doesn't hide the fact that he spent time in prison — twice. But that doesn't mean someone had the right to take his life.

"He was young enough to turn his life around," his mother said. "He just wanted to live."

Adam Tadeo was 25. He was a son, a brother, a cousin and a friend. He was loved.

"These young kids have to get it together. Do they not realize these kids have parents? Have siblings? They have people that care for them," Denise Tadeo said. "Not a minute goes by that I don't think about him. He just didn't deserve to go like that."

On March 25, Tadeo and another Fort Wayne man, De'Anthony Lewis, were found shot in a Chevrolet Impala on the city's south side just after midnight. Tadeo was critically wounded and taken to a hospital, where he later died.

Tadeo was one of the 21 homicide victims in Allen County in 2009. All occurred in Fort Wayne. There were 26 homicides in 2008.

While his family mourned the loss and struggled with spending their first holiday season without him, another person walks the street. Tadeo's killer has not been arrested.

Fort Wayne police Sgt. Carl Moore, who heads the department's homicide unit, said

Homicides, Page 6A

ALLEN COUNTY HOMICIDES

2009	21	1994.....	41
2008.....	26	1993.....	37
2007.....	27	1992.....	25
2006.....	19	1991.....	29
2005.....	31	1990.....	20
2004.....	25	1989.....	27
2003.....	21	1988.....	24
2002.....	30	1987.....	10
2001.....	26	1986.....	19
2000.....	20	1985.....	28
1999.....	24	1984.....	4
1998.....	25	1983.....	19
1997.....	42	1982.....	24
1996.....	18	1981.....	25
1995.....	30	1980.....	21

Sources: Allen County Coroner's Office, Journal Gazette archives

HOMICIDES

Continued from Page 1A

detectives have one suspect in the slaying, but that person has not been charged. The comforting words police can offer his grieving mother have run thin.

"Someone has got to solve all these homicides," she said. "There's no reason not to."

Witnesses crucial

Charges have been filed in four of the year's 21 homicides. Two more cases are under review for possible charges. But the bulk of last year's homicides are unsolved, according to Allen County Prosecutor Karen Richards.

Those are the cases that could have the greatest potential to go cold. A case is considered cold once no new leads are coming in and police have exhausted all tips, Moore said.

Three other cases from 2009 – two police-action shootings and a self-defense shooting – were closed after being ruled justifiable homicides.

In another case, the stabbing death of Mardale Totten, police believe his girlfriend acted in self-defense. Prosecutors have not ruled on this case.

"These families need to know (that) because charges haven't been filed, and nobody's been locked up, it doesn't mean we don't have a suspect," Moore said.

But many families, including the Tadeo family, find themselves longing for answers.

Richards stresses that the main impediment in prosecuting these homicides is getting credible witnesses to come forward.

football – especially the Colts and the Steelers – and played football for Metro Youth Sports when he was younger, she said. He had attended Harding High School and was working on his GED at the time of his death.

At age 20, Tadeo was sentenced to prison for drug dealing. After his release, he got in with the wrong crowd again, his mother said. He went back to prison in 2006 for drug possession.

He was released in July 2008 and was trying to make his life right, his family said. He had held a job loading tires onto tractor-trailer rigs for Progressive Logistic Services in Woodburn for about seven months before being killed.

Tadeo was proud of who he was – and proud of where he came from. The name "Tadeo Boy" was tattooed on his neck. On his forearms, the names "Adam" and "Tadeo" were tattooed.

"He was a mama's boy," said his mother, who raised him on her own. "Family meant a lot to him."

Tadeo's cousin, Chelena Tipton,

23, of Fort Wayne, was especially close to him. He introduced her to her boyfriend in 2000, and they have been together ever since.

Tipton, who is 25 weeks pregnant, said she is hoping for a boy. She wants to name him after her cousin.

Tadeo's father, Melvin Underwood, also of Fort Wayne, said he had reconnected with his son about three months before his death.

"We had just gotten really close," he said. "I just can't believe his life got cut short like that. I still can't believe it. You'd have to be in my shoes to understand."

"It usually takes months to investigate a homicide unless it's just obvious who the perpetrator is from the beginning," Richards said. "If you don't have witnesses, you can't charge cases, and that is not going to change."

Richards also cites gang activity as a hindrance to successful prosecution. Witnesses are often gang members themselves and fear retribution for coming forward.

"Some of these guys live by the sword and die by the sword," Moore said.

One-third of the victims in 2009 were convicted felons who had spent time in prison. Police said they believe several of those cases were drug- or gang-related. All of the victims in 2009 were adults. Of those, 18 were men, three were women.

Seventeen of the deaths occurred on the city's south side, and four were on the north side. Fourteen victims were black, six were white and one was Hispanic. Eighteen victims were shot to death and three were stabbed to death, according to the Allen County Coroner's Office.

'Can't believe it'

Pictures of Adam Tadeo fill his mother's Fort Wayne home. Both a smile and tears come to Denise Tadeo's face as she talks about her youngest son.

He loved basketball and

Seeking closure

Underwood said he had encouraged his son to "slow down," to work and go back to school. He would often drive his son to work. He remembers how Adam would call him "Pops."

Like the rest of Tadeo's family, Underwood wants to see his son's slaying solved. To keep him close to their hearts, the Tadeo family has started a tradition of gathering on his birthday – Oct. 25 – every year.

And on the 25th of each month – which represents both his birthday and date of death – they wear commemorative shirts.

Richards said the closure that families of homicide victims seek from prosecution will only come when community members are forthright about these crimes – and are willing to testify.

But she admits the waiting period that can entail is a difficult time for many families.

At the end of 2008, arrests had been made in three of that year's 26 homicides. In 2009, an additional three cases were solved. But 20 remain unsolved from 2008.

"I don't know who did this to my son, but justice will be served," Denise Tadeo said. "My life's changed now – forever. Half my heart's gone."

habrams@jg.net

*Please note, for reading purposes, the right two columns originally appeared in the newspaper underneath the left two columns.