



John W. Troutt Jr., editor, publisher, chief executive officer and owner of *The Jonesboro Sun*, still runs the newspaper at 68: "The real truth is that news is what I like to do."

An early problem to be solved was how to handle the dozens of out-of-town journalists descending on the town, including TV crews from as far away as Japan. Equally challenging were the hundreds of journalists calling the newspaper from around the world, looking for updates, contacts, background and sound bites.

Troutt decided to put his two sons — assistant publishers Bob, 39, and Ed, 36 — in charge of all of the out-of-town journalists. (Bob and Ed have journalism degrees, are part-owners of the newspaper and have business interests outside the newspaper.) They handled hundreds of phone calls and e-mail messages, dealt with the scores of visiting press, and freed their father and the news staff to work on the story.

How and what did *The Jonesboro Sun* staff members do and how well did they do it? Here is a thumbnail analysis of the crucial first eight days of the story, beginning with the day after the shootings and continuing through the charging of the two suspects, the funeral services, and ending with the communitywide memorial service.

**March 25** First day after the shootings

Banner headline: "Snipers rain death, terror at Westside." Two stories drop out of it, headed: "Four youths, teacher die; 10 more hit" and "Young pair in custody."

The lead story is written in graceful narrative, not inverted pyramid style, acknowledging that virtually everyone in Jonesboro already had learned of the basic facts on TV and radio. It begins "Slaughter on the school yard: before Terrible Tuesday, parents, educators and even policemen wanted to believe it couldn't happen here." After giving the basic facts of the dead and wounded, it goes on to say, "To make the tragedy even more horrific, police sources say they believe the two camouflage-clad shooters are two Westside students, Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson, boys aged 11 and 13."

## SPORTS

Arkansas women earn berth in Final Four

Page 9B

## LOCAL/STATE

Schoolyard rampage stuns city, nation

Page 1B

## WEDNESDAY

Partly cloudy, breezy  
High 74, low 66  
Sunset 6:58 p.m.

50c

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Classifieds ..... 13B Record ..... 8A  
Comics ..... 6C Society ..... 6B  
Editorial ..... 4A Sports ..... 9B

116 PAGES  
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NORTHEAST ARKANSAS REGIONAL NEWSPAPER

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 1998  
JONESBORO, ARKANSAS

## Westside Shooting

**DEAD**  
Natalie Brooks, age 11  
Page Ann Herring, age 12  
Stephanie Johnson, age 12  
Brittany Warner, age 11  
Shannon Wright (teacher)  
**TREATED AND RELEASED**  
Christina Amos, age 13  
Tina McCowan, age 13  
Jenna Brooks, age 12  
Whitney Irving, age 11  
**IN STABLE CONDITION**  
Jennifer Jacobs, age 12  
Candice Porter (no age available)  
Ashley Betts, age 12  
**IN CRITICAL CONDITION**  
Amanda Barnes, age 13  
Brittany Lambie, age 13  
Lynette Threlford (teacher)

## President calls mayor from plane

By DONNA LOYD

**Sun Staff Writer**  
President Bill Clinton telephoned Jonesboro Mayor Robert Brodell shortly before 11 Wednesday morning to extend his sympathies and good thoughts to citizens of Jonesboro and particularly the students and staff of Westside Middle School.

"He called from Air Force One," Brodell told the Sun. "He told me he was awakened in the middle of the night and told about it," Brodell said of the President.

"He was on his way to the airport and couldn't call me before he got on the plane," Brodell said.

"He extended his sympathy to us, the people of Jonesboro and the Westside people," the mayor said.

"He said his heart goes out to us and he realizes it's a hard time for us," Brodell said. The President has expressed to him his concern over the availability and use of weapons in this country.

"He said he didn't know the solution for it, but that he would search hard for one," Brodell said.

"He wanted people to know that his prayers are with us," the mayor said.

Brodell said he had also spoken with other officials in Washington, D.C. after Tuesday's tragedy, including Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater.

**Counselors move fast**

JONESBORO — Education and mental health personnel, plus a score of ministers, moved quickly Tuesday afternoon, marshaling counselors to aid teachers and students alike following the shooting at Westside Middle School that claimed four students and a teacher.

**Sheriff emotional**

JONESBORO — Deputies with the Craighead County Sheriff's Department are delayed with the investigation of a shooting Tuesday at Westside Middle School that Sheriff Dale Haas called "the worst thing I have ever seen." Haas was very emotional Tuesday during a press conference held at the Arkansas State Police Troop C Headquarters in Jonesboro.

**Additional stories & photos on pages 18A, 20A, 1B, 3B**

## The Jonesboro Sun

## Snipers rain death, terror at Westside

## Young pair in custody

By PAUL MITCHELL

Sun Staff Writer

Several Westside Middle School students told the Sun Tuesday that one of the two boys arrested for the fatal shootings of four young girls and a pregnant teacher told them on Monday they would soon learn whether they would live or die.

Police have arrested 13-year-old Mitchell Johnson and his 11-year-old cousin Andrew Golden, in connection with the fatal shootings, which occurred outside the Westside Middle School shortly before 11 Tuesday afternoon.

"Mitchell said something big was going to happen tomorrow," Melinda Hanson, a 13-year-old seventh grade student at Westside Middle School, said. "Mitchell told us that tomorrow you will find out if you live or die."

Hanson, who described herself as "very close friend" of Johnson, said the boy would not elaborate on his statement when she and others questioned him about it.

"He just said, 'You'll find out tomorrow,'" Hanson quoted Johnson as saying.

Jamie Cleveland, a fellow seventh grader, also said Johnson had been threatening statements to students on Monday.

"Mitchell Johnson said he had a lot of killing to do," Cleveland quoted Johnson as saying.

Hanson further described Johnson as "just an average guy" whom she and her parents would give rides to church on Sundays.

"I attend church regularly and he would go with us once in a while," Hanson said, adding that in recent months Johnson began to act strange and even brought in his friends on several occasions that he joined and belonged to a local gang.

"He started doing all these gang signs," Hanson recalled of Johnson. "I told him he should stop that because he was starting to scare me."

Hanson said she "never dreamed" Johnson was allegedly capable of committing such a horrible act of violence.

SEE YOUNG — 2A



**SHOCKED AND DISBELIEVING**  
Rick Griffin, a teacher at the Westside school, counselor Steve Adams, a school employee who works in special education, following the Tuesday shooting rampage.

## Fire alarm sounds before hail of deadly gunfire

By CURT HODGES

Sun Staff Writer

Fire drills are nothing unusual in school. It's just part of the routine, and for many students a fire drill is a time of revelry and a chance to have a good time before returning to the classroom.

They know it's just a drill and nothing more.

But when the fire alarm went off in the Westside Middle School around 12:30 Tuesday afternoon, no one even dreamed that such a simple occurrence would turn deadly.

It was something that students, staff and even much of the world will remember for a long time.

Debbie Spencer, sixth grade teacher in the school, ushered her class of mostly girls down the hall in the west end of the building where they all went immediately to

their assigned area for the drill. Then the shots came.

"It was like they waited for several kids to get out," before starting to shoot, she said.

By the time Mrs. Spencer realized the victims were hurt outside by a false fire alarm. Once outside the building, the 120 students and their

## Four youths, teacher die; 10 more hit

By PAUL MITCHELL

Sun Staff Writer

Slaughter on the schoolyard: before Terrible Tuesday, parents, educators and even policemen wanted to believe it couldn't happen here.

But the horrible reality is, by the time the shooting stopped early Tuesday afternoon, 13 Westside Middle School students and teachers lay dead or injured on the ground outside the building, ambushed from the woods just 100 yards north of the school.

By nightfall, five of the victims, four students and one teacher, were dead from the gunfire. Five students and one teacher remain hospitalized.

To make the tragedy even more horrific, police sources say they believe the camouflage-clad shooters are two Westside students, Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson, boys aged 11 and 13.

Officers said the shooters were armed with both large-caliber and small-caliber weapons. Police seized pistols, high-powered rifles and ammunition when they arrested the suspects, said Sheriff Dale Haas. Haas said investigators don't yet know how many shots were fired from how many guns.

A van parked nearby contained even more guns and ammunition, Haas said, adding that the police aren't sure to whom the vehicle, guns and ammunition belong.

Though they're not finished with their investigation, Craighead County Sheriff's Department and Arkansas State Police detectives assigned the unenviable task of unraveling the brief but deadly shooting spree before the victims were hurt outside by a false fire alarm. Once outside the building, the 120 students and their

SEE FOUR — 2A

SEE FIRE — 20A

## FOUR STUDENTS, TEACHER DIE IN BARRAGE



SHANNON WRIGHT

PAGE ANN HERRING

NATALIE BROOKS

STEPHANIE JOHNSON

BRITTANY WARNER

**The Jonesboro Sun's first day of coverage, March 25, included the impact of the shootings on the community, as well information on the crime itself.**