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Tarrytown mother of slain teen leads gun protest

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THE JOURNAL NEWS

(Original Publication: August 28, 2007)

WHITE PLAINS - Most mothers might have spent the first anniversary of a teenage daughter's death mourning privately at home, at a church or at the graveside.

But Gisela Marin spent yesterday afternoon shouting in the noisy lunchtime hustle of one of Westchester's busiest intersections, where she led about 40 others in a protest calling on Congress to tighten access to handguns of the kind that another teen used when he killed her daughter, Jessica Santos, in a random, drive-by shooting in Yonkers on Aug. 27, 2006.

"How can it be that it takes less time to purchase a gun than it does to buy milk and bread at a local grocery store?" Santos said in a speech, after 32 children and adults dressed in black - each representing one of those shot and killed by a deranged student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University on April 16 - lay down in an orderly row in front of her. "We're not here to take away guns from hunters. We're here to get sensible gun laws passed to protect innocent citizens, especially children."

The short demonstration, sponsored by the Westchester chapter of New Yorkers Against Gun Violence, took place at the fountain plaza at Mamaroneck Avenue and Main Street. Participants called on Congress to close a legal loophole that exempts people who buy guns at gun shows from background checks, and to give local police better access to federal data needed to trace guns.

The protest attracted a handful of onlookers, but most of the event was drowned out by the drone of construction equipment at the Ritz-Carlton towers across Main Street, the midday traffic and the splash of the fountains. For much of the event, a banner reading "Protesteasyguns.com" provided the only clear clue of its purpose.

Nevertheless, several onlookers caught on and agreed.

"The Second Amendment is an antiquated amendment that was put in place when it made sense for people to carry firearms," said Chris Carinu, a 24-year-old magazine intern who handed out invitations to a "sexy and single" competition at Vintage Bar on Sept. 20 as Santos read the names of those killed at Virginia Tech. "There's no reason for people to carry

firearms anymore."

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects "the right of the people to keep and bear arms."

Santos, a Tarrytown resident and a 19-year-old sophomore at University of New Haven, died when she was hit by one of six bullets Anthony Burton fired randomly from a moving car. He was convicted last month of manslaughter and weapons possession charges and faces up to 15 years in prison at his sentencing Sept. 12.

"I'm hoping he gets the maximum," said Marin, who wore a button with a picture of her daughter surrounded by the words "Jessica N. Santos, Forever in Our Heart" on her black blouse.