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University to dedicate classroom in honor of Tarrytown student killed in drive-by

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Jessica Santos had spent only one year at the University of New Haven when she was gunned down in a drive-by shooting in Yonkers.

The 19-year-old Tarrytown resident nonetheless left her mark at the Connecticut school, and now will have her name permanently attached to the leafy campus.

The university today is scheduled to hold a tree-planting ceremony, then dedicate a classroom in Santos' memory - a double honor for the girl who dreamed of becoming an FBI agent.

"You do these things because, first, it's the right thing to do," Mario Gaboury, chairman of the university's Department of Criminal Justice, said yesterday.

"Secondly, I think it's really good for the students who are here to be motivated by this, to try to turn a tragedy into something that could have some positive meaning. The idea of naming a classroom after a student rather than a wealthy donor really makes a big impact."

Santos was in Yonkers with friends on Aug. 27 when gunfire erupted from a passing car, mortally wounding her. She was due to leave for New Haven the next day.

Yonkers police later arrested Anthony Burton, 17, and charged him with murder. The case is pending in state Supreme Court.

The slaying turned Santos' mother, Gisela Marin of Tarrytown, into a community activist.

Marin, 45, has since founded the Jessica N. Santos Foundation, which will host a fundraiser in Tarrytown this summer, and revived the Westchester chapter of New Yorkers Against Gun Violence.

Marin also is scheduled to be on hand today for the memorial ceremonies at the university for her only child.

Last year, the school also held a memorial ceremony for Santos.

"I can't even express myself because it's so overwhelming, the way they have embraced this tragedy and made something positive out of it," Marin said. "Both events are to create a positive tribute to Jessica's memory."

The tree will be planted near the university's Marvin K. Peterson Library, with a commemoration ceremony at 12:30 p.m.

At 1:25 p.m., the school plans to dedicate Room 109 in Kaplan Hall to Santos, renaming it the Jessica N. Santos Memorial Classroom.