

Citizen groups convene over gun laws

Xue and Reiss deaths spark activism

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By Jason Starr
The Essex Reporter

In Essex, where three very different fatal shooting incidents have occurred in the past three years, two simultaneous efforts to study gun laws are underway.

Parents Ge Wu and Shuwan Xue shared details of their son's suicide with The Essex Reporter last week. They discussed how Aaron Xue, 15, acquired the handgun he used to shoot himself behind the Essex High School library on the night of April 17. Essex Police, who are no longer actively investigating the shooting, confirmed that another youth took the weapon along with a second handgun and ammunition from his home and hid them in a wooded area along Essex Way near the Xue family's house. The youth showed the guns in their hiding place to Aaron and another youth on the day of Aaron's death.

A group of parents who knew Aaron Xue planned to meet at Brownell Library on Sunday for an initial discussion about what can be done to make it more difficult for children to use guns. They plan to broaden participation in the discussion this fall to include all members of the community. A public forum to discuss gun reform and suicide prevention is being planned by Aaron's parents and other parents for Thursday, Sept. 17, at 7 p.m. at the Essex High School cafeteria.

"Number one is raising awareness that a gun was easily accessible, and if he had not had access to a lethal weapon, he most likely would still be here," said Monica John, a member of the group. "How many more lives have to be lost before we wake up and say, 'we've got to do something'?"

"There needs to be stricter laws around handguns," she concluded. "I don't think they should be as easily accessible."

The other group coming together around gun laws is focusing less on how they are acquired and more on where they can be fired.

The Essex Selectboard last month began recruiting citizens to serve on a task force aimed at researching the town's firearms ordinance. The ordinance allows discharging firearms in the rural areas of Essex and bans it in the more populated areas.

The ordinance has been called into question by some residents since the shooting death last September of John Reiss, a retired St. Michael's College professor, at his home on Old Stage Road.

Reiss was shot by an apparently stray bullet from a nearby backyard firing range. Two men have been charged with involuntary manslaughter as a result of the death.

The Essex Selectboard, after weighing public sentiment, voted to leave the town's firearms ordinance unchanged. The board also voted to create a task force of citizens interested in studying the ordinance and recommending possible changes.

According to the Essex town offices, 24 residents have expressed interest in being a part of the task force.

Monica John said she is aware of the task force but is not aware of any plans for the two groups to collaborate efforts.

The death of John Reiss in September of 2008 came about two years after a shooting rampage at Essex Elementary School and a private home off Essex Way. Alicia Shanks was killed in her classroom, fellow teacher Jenky Snedeker was seriously injured, and Linda Lambesis, the mother of the killer's ex-girlfriend, was killed in her home. Former Essex resident Christopher Williams is serving a life sentence for the crimes.

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IN 2007, Ge Wu, Emily Xue, Aaron Xue and Shuwan Xue traveled to China to visit relatives. This family portrait was taken during that trip

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE XUE FAMILY

Public Forum

Ge Wu and Shuwan Xue with a group of concerned parents, are planning a public forum for later this month to tell their son's story and urge Essex police and school administrators to be proactive in educating young people and their parents about gun safety and suicide prevention. Watch The Essex Reporter and our website for details about the meeting.

[Learn more about gun laws](#)

