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VERONIQUE POZNER, the mother of Noah Pozner, is escorted to her car by a friend after his funeral Monday.

A SMALL TOWN STRUGGLES TO FIND ITS EQUILIBRIUM

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At the Lathrop School of Dance on Main Street, a gaggle of pint-sized 4-year-olds hopped around and flapped their arms and wiggled their tail feathers Monday morning, practicing the Chicken Dance under the tutelage of Miss Diane.

It might have taken the would-be

ballerinas a little longer to get to class on this morning. The road outside Diane Wardenburg's studio was clogged with satellite trucks, lined up to capture the nearby funeral for Jack Pinto, shot dead in his elementary school Friday at the age of 6.

"My husband asked me Sunday morning

before church: ‘What are you going to do?’ “ Wardenburg said.

She answered: “We’re teaching.”

It was a defiant act of normalcy in a town struggling to make sense of the word. A day after a gunman shot his way into the Sandy Hook Elementary School and killed 20 children and six adults, one grieving father, Robbie Parker, told reporters, “My wife and I don’t understand how to process all of this and how to get our lives going.”

That same sense of loss and dread lingers throughout this small town, represented in endless makeshift memorials, in lawns studded with angels and crosses and flags, in handwritten signs over store windows, in still-shocked residents greeting each other with wordless embraces.

Wardenburg did not know any of the young students killed. But that doesn’t spare her the heartache.

“It’s our children,” she said simply. “I turn on the TV from 5 to 7 and have my coffee and cry period -- like everybody.”

TWO FUNERALS

Two of the 20 children were buried Monday: Jack Pinto, a New York Giants fan, and 6-year-old Noah Pozner, who loved tacos and wanted to be a doctor.

Journalists from around the world watched as mourners lined up in the drizzling rain for Jack’s service. Little boys congregated outside the white clapboard church, bracing against the cold in team jackets and oversized sport coats.

Fifteen miles south, in Fairfield, scores of local and state police stood guard at the Abraham L. Green & Son Funeral Home as family and friends arrived for Noah’s funeral.

White balloons were tethered to street

signs and to weighted, gold-colored bags. A neon green sign was fastened to a large oak tree, with the words, “Our hearts are with you Noah.”

Noah’s twin sister also attended Sandy Hook Elementary. She survived the massacre.

Fairfield police Lt. James Perez described the mood inside the funeral home as “a thick, deep sadness coupled with intense love.”

Perez was not spared that sadness. “To see such a small casket left me literally speechless,” he said.

Noah’s funeral lasted more than an hour and, as mourners filed out, a few stopped to talk to the dozens of reporters assembled across the street.

Roxanne Dunn, 42, sobbed, her hands clutching her face as she shook.

“This is horrifying,” she said. “He touched us all.”

It was all she could muster.

SHARED PAIN

Newtown’s pain has rippled far beyond the community, and people streamed toward the town all day Monday, creating a bumper-to-bumper traffic jam that stretched back to the highway.

In the center of Sandy Hook, less than a quarter-mile from the elementary school, an improvised memorial grew larger and larger as visitors brought tokens of sympathy. The result was a massive pile of balloons, flickering votives, Beanie Babies and Build-A-Bears, bouquets, rosary beads, prayer cards, poetry verses, plastic angels and paper cranes. The lower branches of a towering pine were laden with cards and pictures, some delivered from Ohio, Michigan and elsewhere.

A truck driver from Canada on his way

to a delivery in Middlebury parked his rig on I-84 and walked into town to deposit a stuffed white bear adorned with a green ribbon -- the elementary school's colors. As the father of a 9-year-old daughter, he said, he figured it was the least he could do.

A trio of lacrosse players from the University of New Haven came to the memorial site after spending the morning running around in a gym with children from the town. The college students played kickball and other games with a group of primary school kids "to help them cope and take their minds off things," said Kyle Hurley, a 21-year-old from Rhode Island.

"We just wanted to help," said James Egan, 19, of New York.

That same impulse brought Tim Engel and Barnabas to Newtown. Engel, a Lutheran minister from Indiana, and Barnabas, a nearly 3-year-old golden retriever, are part of a comfort dog program run by Lutheran Church Charities.

"Last month, Barnabas and I were in New York and New Jersey after Sandy," said Engel, pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Portage, Ind.

The group brought nine golden retrievers to Connecticut. Six went to a community center where children had gathered, and three, Barnabas among them, were mingling among the crowd at the memorial site.

The dogs "by their very nature impart hope and encouragement," said Engel. "And then they give us the opportunity to talk with people and to pray with people."

Eric J. Pongonis and his wife, April, came to pay their respects. "I've just been crying all weekend thinking about this," April Pongonis said. "I can't sleep at night."

The couple decided earlier this year to keep their twin 5-year-old daughters in day care for another year instead of enrolling them at Sandy Hook Elementary.

"We witnessed parents running up the hill to the school and that's when it really hit me," Eric J. Pongonis said. "Our girls would have been there."

Near the memorial, four young men, including Fred Knapp, a cousin of slain teacher Victoria Soto, held a cardboard box of green-and-white ribbons with the message "faith, hope, love."

"It's a way to show support," said Thomas Mastrocinque. "We're a small town, we all know each other, we're all in each other's business. There's absolutely nobody from this town, not one person, who doesn't know somebody [who died] or who wasn't hurt by this."

Knapp wore a solid green ribbon in a different shade from the others, similar to ones handed out Saturday night in Stratford at a vigil for Victoria Soto.

"It was her favorite color," he said.

WORLD NEWS

The memorial is not far from the international TV news army that has settled in.

Church Hill Road was clogged with news vans from Boston, New York and Philadelphia. Canadian TV satellite trucks occupied a large stretch of the United Methodist Church parking lot. Sidewalks were a maze of tripods, cables, high-intensity lights, microphone-wielding broadcasters and burly cameramen.

"No media" signs hung from the doors of several stores, and many people scowled at the hordes of interviewers or pointedly walked away from them.

Tim Snellman sent his 12-year-old-son

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and 10-year-old daughter to Norwalk to be with his parents because he wanted to shield them from the media circus. A TV crew from France tried to interview him Friday. When he went out to dinner with his wife, an ABC crew asked to share his table because the restaurant was so crowded.

“You almost feel like they’re taking over your town,” he said.

Snellman’s son was tutored by Soto. His daughter graduated from Sandy Hook Elementary last year. Through his work with the Cub Scouts, he knows two of the families who lost children.

“People have a lot of sympathy for our town. There are a lot of people that have

big hearts in this country and around the world,” said Snellman. “It’s uplifting in one way, but extremely depressing in another way to be known for this.”

Back at Lathrop’s School of Dance, Wardenburg finished up the day’s lesson and found herself thinking about the days ahead. She’s determined to have cheer return to her town.

On Monday morning, Wardenburg’s son, who is 14, asked her: “Are we having a happy Christmas?”

She said she told him: “Yes, we are.”

Courant staff writers Mara Lee, Don Stacom, Matthew Sturdevant and Daniela Altimari contributed to this story.