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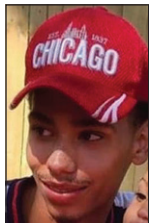
**ONLINE AT ABCNEWSPAPERS.COM**

# SAY HIS NAME

## Columbia Heights remembers Columbia Academy student Daunte Wright at vigil

By Paige Kieffer  
Staff Writer

The Columbia Heights community and local students gathered at Kordiak Park Friday, April 16, to remember and honor Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man who was fatally shot April 11 by former Brooklyn Center police officer Kimberly Ann Potter. Police have said Potter accidentally fired her gun instead of her Taser during an attempted arrest for an outstanding warrant that resulted in a struggle during a traffic stop in Brooklyn Center.



**Wright**

Wright, who was a Columbia Academy student before transferring out of district for high school, was well known in the Columbia Heights community.

“On behalf of Columbia Heights Public Schools, I first and foremost want to express our deep condolences to the Wright family,” Superintendent Zena Stenvik said at the April 16 vigil. “The school community knows the family well, and I know it has been a tough week at each of our buildings just remembering the Wright family. ... [Daunte Wright] will be missed.”

After the killing of Wright, a group of Columbia Heights School District teachers, Stenvik and Columbia Heights



Rev. Jin Kim, pastor of Church of All Nations in Columbia Heights, speaks at a vigil Friday, April 16, at Kordiak Park for Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man who was fatally shot April 11 by former Brooklyn Center police officer Kimberly Ann Potter during a traffic stop in Brooklyn Center. Wright was a former Columbia Academy student. Photo by Paige Kieffer

Mayor Amáda Márquez Simula banded together to hold a community vigil for Wright that was safe for all ages. Simula is also an adult enrichment and senior program manager in the district.

“Columbia Heights Public Schools was happy to partner with the mayor to address our anti-racism platform,” Stenvik said at the vigil. “We look at our strong, beautiful children and students and we’re so proud of

them. On behalf of the school administration I want to address the students to say that we see you, we care about you, we love you and we’re so proud of you. I know it has been an unimaginable year for everybody. Week

after week it seems like there’s another instance of racist acts, and we’re here to just care for you while you’re in our schools. ... We’re here to demand that

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### LIFE

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Columbia Heights School District students mourn the loss of Daunte Wright, 20, a former Columbia Academy student, at a vigil Friday, April 16, at Kordiak Park. Wright was shot and killed April 11 by former Brooklyn Center police officer Kimberly Ann Potter during a traffic stop. Photo by Paige Kieffer

## Columbia Heights holds vigil in honor of former Columbia Academy student

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[the] future be welcoming to our highly talented and amazing students. I would like, as we send our graduates off into the world, that the world embrace and love them as much as we do because that's at a minimum what they deserve."

During the event, teachers and community members were available to anyone who wanted to talk about and process Wright's death.

"Together we're gathering because we're hurting," Márquez Simula said at the start of the vigil to a crowd of approximately 100. "We're angry, we're sad and we're scared. We're gathering because we're not alone. ... We're not alone in these emotions and these feelings."

The vigil not only remembered and honored the life of Daunte Wright but also George Floyd — a 46-year-old Black man killed in Minneapolis by former Minneap-

olis police officer Derek Chauvin, who was found guilty of murder April 20 — and 13-year-old Mexican-American Adam Toledo, who was shot and killed by police in west Chicago.

"We're here because of racism," Márquez Simula said to the crowd. "Many of us here today have experienced racism. Ways that have made us feel less than, small or unwelcomed."

Márquez Simula, who is Columbia Heights' first Latina mayor, shared how she experienced racism as a young mother when she was frequently mistaken for being her children's nanny because they have lighter skin.

"What hurt more than people calling me the nanny was how no one said, 'Don't ask her that.' No one ever said, 'How dare you?'" Márquez Simula said. "I want to say to the white people here, look for those opportunities to tell people, 'Hey you don't get to say that. You need to

apologize.' And we need to be bold in that. We need to realize that we shouldn't be afraid of saying those things to people."

"I don't want Columbia Heights to be this way," Márquez Simula continued. "I want Columbia Heights to be a welcoming city."

Márquez Simula asked the crowd to let her know if they see anything racist or are the victim of racism.

"If I hear of these things, I promise I will look into this and I will get to the bottom of it because this is not what we want this city to be like," she said.

Other speakers at the event included community leaders, Columbia Heights School District staff and students and members of Wright's family.

"When I found out about what happened to Daunte Wright, I couldn't stop crying, because all I could feel was the fear he possibly had when he got

pulled over," said Kiki Latham, a local Black LGBTQIA2S+ activist. "We all know that fear from George Floyd, and that fear has not left us. I feel like the past year I wanted to hide. I wanted to duck away so I wouldn't gather any attention to myself as a person of color. And with the Derek Chauvin trial, I thought finally we're going to have some peace. Finally we're going to get the justice we deserve. Finally Black lives matter because this man is on trial for what he did to George Floyd, and then Daunte Wright lost his life and all that fear, all terror rushed back. ... It almost feels like we're being targeted just because of our color, and I'm really tired of it. ... Black people deserve respect. We deserve love. We deserve importance. We deserve it. ... Black lives matter and this needs to stop. Period!"

Columbia Heights High School junior Drake Pham shared a poem with the crowd.

"As a half-white individual in this nation, I think about what I can do to help," Pham said. "Can I do more? It has to be more. After George Floyd was killed, after Breonna Taylor was killed and after Daunte Wright, I thought to myself how many more? Those three words helped me make this poem. The title is 'How many more?'"

"How many more do we have to witness?" Pham continued, reading his poem. "Each one a grim reminder of the sickness. They say change is near, but going outside is still the deepest fear. Walk with purpose as if it's your fate. Call your mom before it's too late. Every month there's a new name. Nothing new, it's all the same. He was just jogging in his neighborhood, and still they assumed he was up to no good. Playing with a toy gun is fun he said. Now the gravestone is where he rests his head. It's not that bad, she's safe in bed. She better be careful or wind up dead. Get home safe,

yes you should, but that's not possible when he wears a hood. I can't breathe he said. Eight minutes later he was dead. Taser! Taser! Were the last words he heard. Now he flies high like a bird. Protest here, protest there. It's no use. They don't care. Rubber bullets and tear gas. Just another way to make time pass. It's about time to let freedom ring. 'No more names,' they try to sing. How many more will it take for them to realize that oppression isn't fake. How many more families will need to shatter, for them to realize that Black lives really matter."

Aaron Goff spoke about how he coached Daunte Wright in basketball when he was in seventh and eighth grade at Columbia Academy.

"I'm going to talk about the Daunte I knew," Goff said. "He was one of the nicest kids I knew. He had a great sense of humor. He was always respectable to adults, and

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# Daunte Wright vigil

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he had a passion. He just wanted to learn. He was probably one of the most approachable kids I had in my 16 years of coaching because he wanted to learn. ... He's going to be missed. He was a great kid."

"It's heartbreaking that even as a state senator I'm so powerless to make the changes that are necessary in this community," Sen. Mary Kunesh, DFL-New Brighton, said. "A little boy lost his dad. A mother and father lost their son. Siblings lost their brother. First-grade teachers lost that little boy they taught to read and write. ... That's the reality of this situation and so many other situations. We lost a valued, loving member of our community, and it has to stop."

Rev. Jin Kim, pastor of Church of All Nations in Columbia Heights, asked the crowd to think about how racism is embedded into society in the United States, and then work on changing it.

"Why does it have to

be countless before we ask what's going on?" he said. "We have to realize that injustice in our society is so baked in that everything we do is basically on top of an unjust system. ... We can tinker at the edges, which some people do, or a new generation can rise up in my opinion and overturn the whole system."

Columbia Heights High School sophomore Marissa Foy and juniors Amara Thompson and Lulu Mohamed also spoke at the event.

All three women planned to participate in the statewide school walk-out April 19 that was led by the group Minnesota Teens Activists to protest racial injustice and the killing of Daunte Wright. Mohamed led the Columbia Heights High School walkout.

"I can't believe how much the littlest things don't matter, when since 8 years old you've been told that your dream of changing the world is a little too bold because your great-grandmother was bought and sold, because



Following a vigil for Daunte Wright Friday, April 16, a silent march went around Kordiak Park in Columbia Heights to protest the killing of people of color by law enforcement. Photo by Paige Kieffer

you have melanin and that makes you a threat," Thompson said, sharing a poem with the crowd that was also shared during the walkout. "What were your parents teaching you at 8? How to read, write, spell, tell if someone isn't doing well. Well I was learning that I could not wear a hood at night. I can't pass by a cop alone. I can't

talk. I can't move because if I do I'll get shot. I'll get shot with a .22. I'm not just a hashtag. My brothers and sisters are not just a hashtag that matter just for a weekend and get forgotten. Welcome to the divide, the United States of America, where the people they stole and brought here aren't wanted. Where we're forced into poverty

so we can't get an education properly, but we sure as hell know that there's inequality in this place they claim is a democracy."

Mohamed shared a poem that takes the perspective of a Black mother.

"I'm so sorry my sweet baby boy, my daring daughter," she said. "I'm so sorry that your skin makes you a target. That your skin makes you a terrorist in a country that was built off of the back of your people."

"We're all here today because we're all tired of seeing the justice system fail us once again," Foy

said. "We all want to make a difference in our world even if we know it's the smallest we can make. We all just want to be there for the families who lost so much. ... We all want to see something different in our world even though we know it might not happen, but we can do it one step at a time."

Wright's sister, Diamond Wright, spoke and thanked the crowd for holding the vigil. "We appreciate everyone coming out for Daunte," she said.

The vigil ended with a silent march around Kordiak Park, to reflect on the loss of Daunte Wright.

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A Columbia Heights High School student makes a Black Power fist Friday, April 16, during a march at a vigil for Daunte Wright at Kordiak Park. Wright was shot and killed April 11 by former Brooklyn Center police officer Kimberly Ann Potter. Photo by Paige Kieffer