Kent State killings: ‘Saddest day of my life’

City risk manager, 61, recalls tragedy as ‘dumb college kid’

By Edythe Jensen
The Republic | azcentral.com

Ladd Leder talks about May 4, 1970, like it was yesterday. “It was the saddest day of my life.”

The 64-year-old Chandler risk manager was a student at Kent State University and witnessed the killing of four of his classmates by National Guard troops 40 years ago this month.

The shootings have come to symbolize a great American tragedy that happened at the height of the Vietnam War era. But it’s personal for Leder, who at the time was a recently married marketing major. His wife, Phylis, was a student, but on that day she decided to go home after class and he wanted to experience the excitement of a campus rally.

“I was just a dumb college kid and it was a nice day,” he said. “There was a rally at noon and that was a big deal.”

Chandler risk manager Ladd Leder, 61, was a student at Kent State in 1970.

Weekend protests and the burning of the campus ROTC building brought armed National Guard troops and their helicopters to campus. And after a long, cold winter, it was warm and sunny.

“I was to the right of the common area where I could see all the action,” as an observer, not a participant, he said. “We saw the Guard assemble, they had a formation and they were marching. They were throwing tear gas canisters and some of the students were throwing them back. There was kind of a haze over the area from the tear gas.

“Then, the Guard moved up the hill right in front of me. I couldn’t see the troops firing, but I could hear the sounds... someone kept saying, ‘disperse;’ we didn’t, then we heard shooting and it was much more serious. We saw a dozen dead. It was all over in 40 or 45 minutes.”

There was chaos and distress; everyone was ordered to leave town. Leder ran home to Phylis. His mother had called in a panic when she heard national news reports of the confrontation and deaths. The couple packed their 1966 Mustang and headed out. They were stopped on the road by a guar of a “hatred,” their trunk unloaded and car searched. “That still bothers me; I know what it’s like to be profiled,” he said.

Leder was a member of the campus ROTC. One of the students killed that day - 10-year-old William Schroeder - was in Leder’s class.

The Leiders are now grandparents. Every year on May 4 “my wife and I commemorate the saddest day in our lives. It was senseless and had a profound affect on us.”

They might soon be moving back to Ohio to live near their children. Leder’s job is being eliminated as part of city budget cuts and he plans to take an early retirement incentive that requires him to leave in October.

Chip in and help Chandler cross finish line in All-American City competition

Chandler could be the next All-America City. But it needs the community’s help.

OUR VIEW

The city is seeking sponsorships to make its case for the award. Chandler was nominated by the National Civic League for curbing underage drinking, providing health care to needy children and being a good steward of natural and municipal resources. But the prospects of winning the award have not blinded city officials, who still have fiscal responsibility to residents. They want to use donations instead of tax dollars to pay for the trip.

The award could serve as an economic development tool to show prospective businesses and industries that Chandler works hard to overcome adversity and build prosperous neighborhoods. The more businesses and industries that call Chandler home, the more sustainable the city becomes, with a healthy tax base and good-paying jobs.

The city is the only one in Arizona to be nominated this year. But the contest is far from over - 26 other communities across the U.S. are vying for the award.

More than $12,000 has been raised but around $50,000 is needed to cover the trip. That is an ambitious goal in this economy. But Chandler is no stranger to challenges.

The city has worked with ICAN’s underage-drinking task force to help combat the problem. It has provided medical attention and immunizations to more than 3,000 uninsured children in 10 years through the Chandler CARE Center, thanks to medical, dental and other professionals who donate their services.

And it built a multipurpose development to house a police substation, the Environmental Education Center and a water treatment facility, demonstrating its commitment to using natural and municipal resources wisely. The community can help the city further by donating to the trip at chandleraz.gov.

First-time homebuyers workshop

Chandler’s Neighborhood Resources Division will host another installment in a series of workshops explaining the city’s First Time Homebuyers Program.

Recent changes have resulted in the entire city being opened up to the program designed to reduce foreclosure and vacant homes.

- Waldo B. Johnson/The Republic | azcentral.com

WHEN AND WHERE

The hourlong workshop is set for 6:30 p.m. Thursday at the Community Center at 125 E. Commonwealth Ave. in downtown Chandler. The community center is just east of Arizona Avenue near the library and museum.

PROGRAM DETAILS

Chandler has received federal grants to help income-qualified families rehabilitate and purchase homes in the city. The workshop explains the program and how to qualify. Potential homebuyers find a suitable home and Tempe-based Newtown Community Land Trust (the non-profit organization Chandler partnered with to administer the program) would buy the home. The home would then be sold to the program participant, while the land the house sits on would be held in a trust administrated by Newtown. That arrangement helps lower the cost of the home and makes it affordable in the event it is sold.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To register for a workshop or to learn more about the program, contact Chandler’s Neighborhood Resources Division at 480-782-4520 or visit www.chandleraz.gov and enter homebuyers in the search engine.

10 programs receive grants

The Boys & Girls Clubs of the East Valley has received a grant of $1,000 in support of the Chandler Compadre branch Guardians for Kids program. The grant is one of 10 awarded by the Downtown Chandler Community Foundation.

Another $1,000 grant went to Chandler Care Center for dental care for unlicensed Chandler children.

Other recipients, grants and uses:
- AZ Give Camp, $350, for the camp; $50 to Chandler Christian Community Center, for the Chandler Food Bank; Chandler Central Foundation, $1,000 for Chandler Young Actors Group summer camp.
- Community School of the Arts, $250; Gang Plazz, $500, upcoming Downtown after-school programs, and Xico Inc, $500, the Art & Youth Development Program.

Grant requests are considered twice a year. The next deadline is Sept. 15. Applications: Downtownchandler.org.