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Hundreds remember slain Gateway High School student

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 By Nate Guidry, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Several dozen pink balloons were released into the air as a trumpeter played taps last night, signaling the end of a sorrowful evening in Monroeville as hundreds of Gateway High School friends and classmates mourned the loss of one of their own.

More than 1,000 students and faculty gathered inside the school gymnasium for a vigil to remember 16-year-old Demi Cuccia, a Gateway cheerleader who was stabbed to death at her home Wednesday.

Allegheny County police yesterday charged Demi's boyfriend, John Mullarkey, 18, of Monroeville, with criminal homicide in her death.

Mr. Mullarkey is accused of stabbing Demi in the chest in her Elliott Road home in Monroeville before slashing his throat in an attempt to kill himself. He was upgraded Saturday from critical to fair condition in Allegheny General Hospital, where he was arraigned on the homicide charge.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Friday.

Police said the couple had a volatile, on-again, off-again relationship. Some of Demi's friends on the Gateway High School cheerleading squad said Mr. Mullarkey, a 2007 Gateway graduate, was a possessive and jealous boyfriend. The two had dated for about two years.



Demi Cuccia

During last night's hourlong vigil, Paul Kirschbaum, pastor of the Monroeville Assembly of God, asked God to protect Demi's classmates and other students from the cynicism that often arises from such tragedies.

"Demi was a special person because she was a loving person," he said.

In one touching moment, Kelly Perry, Gateway cheerleading coach, strummed a guitar as she sang a song of remembrance. The lights from several hundred cell phones flickered throughout the gymnasium, a symbolic replacement for candles.

As the song came to an end, people started to cry and embraced one another.

Demi's mother, Jodi Cuccia, spoke about how her daughter was born in Atlanta. The family moved to Pittsburgh when she was 2 years old.

Jodi Cuccia shared a journal that Demi kept when she was in the seventh grade.

In it, Demi wrote about how she liked to Rollerblade and go to the movies with friends.

She also wrote about her many "pet peeves," which elicited laughter from the crowd: Demi didn't like people who "squished" her and spit in her food, people who ran their fingernails against a blackboard and people who didn't wash their hands after using the bathroom.

Demi also wrote about her dreams of one day going to college and possibly becoming a doctor or lawyer, how she eventually wanted to raise a family, have three children and live near the beach.



Annie O'Neill, Post-Gazette

Mourners embrace after balloons were released at the end of a memorial service for Demi Cuccia at Gateway High School last night.

[Click photo for larger image.](#)

Funeral information

A memorial visitation will be held today from 9 to 11 a.m. at the Monroeville Assembly of God, followed by a funeral service at 11. Also, the church's youth ministry group Crossfire will provide grief counseling for teenagers during its weekly gathering Wednesday at 7 p.m. in the church gymnasium, 4561 Old William Penn Highway.



John Mullarkey

Online tributes

Video memorials to Demi Cuccia have begun appearing on the Web:

- [Demi Cuccia Tribute at YouTube](#)
- ["RIP" at One True Media](#)

Online guestbook

- [Pay your respects here](#)

Denise Ross, vice president of the Gateway cheerleader booster club, said Demi also had many favorite colors. One of them was pink.

And it was evident throughout the vigil.

Some members of the cheerleading squad wore pink ribbons in their hair and at one point each placed a pink rose on a table near a large portrait of Demi as Monroeville police Officer James Markel sang "Ave Maria."

And then, of course, there were the pink balloons.

Jodi Cuccia thanked the crowd that had assembled for their kindness during such a trying time.

"Demi would be amazed by all of this support you all have given my family," she said.

"Because of our strong faith, I believe Demi can look down and see this. We love you and Demi loves you, too."

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