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Gang member arrested in bus stop shooting

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Amir Khani, 50, who has owned a discount store on Central since 1989, said the neighborhood has long been plagued by crime.

Police say a 48th Street Crip who has been trying to boost his reputation as an enforcer in South L.A. is responsible for the violence that left five children and three adults wounded.

By Ari B. Bloomekatz and Paloma Esquivel, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers
5:42 PM PST, February 28, 2008



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Police have arrested a gang member they say is responsible for Wednesday's shooting at a crowded bus stop in South Los Angeles that left five children and three adults wounded.

The suspect, Billy Ray Hines, 24, is a member of the 48th Street Crips and over the last few months has been trying to boost his reputation in the neighborhood as an enforcer, police said.



PHOTO GALLERY
8 people shot at bus stop



Surveillance videos from nearby businesses show a man trying to shoot at least one person who dodged in and out of pedestrians on the sidewalk, said Los Angeles Police Department Deputy Chief Sergio Diaz.

The shooting took place in front of scores of witnesses, many of them students who were on their way home from George Washington Carver Middle School.

The school is just blocks from the intersection of Central and Vernon avenues, where the gunman began firing into a crowd of people shortly after 3 p.m. Wednesday. In a scene of chaos, witnesses described a gunman who seemingly appeared from out of nowhere and began spraying the crowd indiscriminately. As bystanders dived to the ground, some adults swept up children from the path of gunfire.

All five wounded children, ages 10 to 14, are students at Carver, school administrators said today. A 12-year-old girl, the most seriously injured, remained hospitalized at

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 **afternoon**
GRAPHIC
Suspect arrested
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Childrens Hospital Los Angeles in stable condition with a bullet wound to her chest, officials said. Three adults -- a 48-year-old man, a 49-year-old woman and a 68-year-old man -- were also wounded.

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At Carver Middle School today, administrators said counselors were on campus to speak to students. In addition, security in and around the school was increased from one school police officer to four officers for at least the rest of the week.

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Parents dropping off their children at the school this morning seemed anxious and said they were concerned that the area was unsafe. Still, some said there seemed to be little they could do.

"It's difficult but we can't be with our children all the time," said Jaime Ramirez, 37, whose son goes to Carver. "But every day there is violence around here."

Some witnesses told police that the gunman had been on a bus and argued with someone after getting off. But others said he was already in the crowd. Police were investigating the possibility that the gunman had an intended target and caught others in a spray of bullets.


Tomasa Gutierrez, 32, had just gotten off a bus and was walking among dozens of students near Vernon and Central avenues when she heard a volley of shots. A girl in front of her collapsed in her arms, wounded.

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She scooped up the girl and rushed her back to the nearby Carver campus, Gutierrez said.

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"It was a little girl," she said. "I had her in my arms until the paramedics came."

Guadalupe Olivos, a 13-year-old eighth-grader at the school, was crossing the intersection shortly after 3 p.m. when the gunfire exploded. "Everyone just dropped," she said.

Witnesses told police that the gunman fired about 15 rounds from a semiautomatic handgun into the group of blacks and Latinos, many of whom were waiting for buses in front of a fast-food restaurant. Afterward, the gunman-- who police said was wearing a white T-shirt, blue pants and appeared to be about 5 feet 7 and 160 pounds -- calmly walked away.

"This [area has] a density of foot traffic like few places in the city. There were tons of people and tons of traffic around," Diaz said.

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"It appears he was shooting indiscriminately into the crowd," LAPD Cmdr. Andy Smith added. "It is not clear who he was shooting at."

Alejandro Montiel, a cashier at a Jack in the Box restaurant on Central Avenue, said a girl sitting at a window witnessed the shooting. She broke into tears and called police on her cellphone, he said.

Amir Khani, owner of a discount store next to the Jack in the Box, said he was unloading groceries from a van in front of the store when he heard the shooting. He said he looked up to see a man put a gun in his pants and flee the scene, heading north.

Another man ran through his store and out the back, he said, and at least one motorist had a window blown out by gunfire.

Khani, who has operated his store since 1989, said the shooting was not a surprise.

"These things, on this corner, happen all the time -- street fighting, gangbanging," he said. "We see a lot of things around here. It's not surprising, because it happens all the time."

He said neighbors had asked police for more patrols because there are three schools in the immediate area. He said between 2 and 5 p.m. the streets are bustling with students, and that is when most of the gang activity occurs.

Alex Pascual, a 13-year-old seventh-grader, said he was among a group of students who remained in the school cafeteria because officials initially thought there could be a gunman on campus. He saw a young girl "running to the school all bleeding," he said.

The bloodshed extended a string of unconnected mass shootings in recent weeks across Los Angeles and Orange counties. Though crime rates have generally declined in recent years, Wednesday's attack occurred in the LAPD's Newton Division, which has seen the number of shooting victims increase about 26% so far

this year compared with last year.

There have been five homicides in the area so far this year, the same as last year. But most of those fatalities have been in recent weeks. Historically, the area is among the most violent in the city.

Gutierrez, who carried a girl to safety, said the neighborhood was known for gang activity.

"We fear for our lives here," she said.

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Times staff writers Susannah Rosenblatt, Victoria Kim, Richard Winton, Jean-Paul Renaud and Rich Connell contributed to this report.



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