

# PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

## Stabbing survivors ready for fresh start

*Franklin Regional students enthusiastic, introspective as new school year approaches*

BY CRAIG SMITH AND RENATTA SIGNORINI

The hole that remains in Jared Boger's chest is an inescapable reminder of that sunny April morning, just moments before the start of classes in Franklin Regional Senior High School, when his life was nearly cut short.

By morning's end, Boger, 17, was in critical condition in UPMC Presbyterian, his liver, diaphragm and surrounding blood vessels slashed when a fellow student allegedly went on a knife-wielding rampage, wounding him and 20 others.

Five months and four surgeries later, Boger's life is back on track.

Doctors say the hole in his chest will heal, and with time, the emotional wounds will lessen.

Boger, like so many of his classmates, hopes to put the events of April 9 behind him when he walks into the Murrysville school for the start of his senior year on Monday.

"I don't ponder on it," said Boger, one of the most seriously injured in the attack.

For the most part, students have moved past the fear of seeing the place where the attack took place.

"Now we're in a different phase of that healing," Franklin Regional Assistant Superintendent Mary Catherine Reljac said.

Boger has not forgotten that luck was on his side that day.

Another inch or so and the stainless steel kitchen knife used in the attack might have

## 'We see it as the new beginning'

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sliced through his heart and aorta, doctors said.

"You look at things differently ... don't take anything for granted," said Boger, who had a job doing landscaping work over the summer and hopes to resume playing baseball in the spring. He plans to attend college but is not sure where or what his major will be.

Boger talks freely about his recovery, his twice-a-week physical therapy sessions and his summer, but not about Alex Hribal, 16, whom police have charged as an adult in connection with the 16-minute stabbing spree.

And when the first day of classes rolls around, Boger said, he won't be worried about walking through the hallway where the attacks occurred.

"I've been through the halls; it won't bother me at all," he said.

Instead, Boger's thoughts are typical of a teenager lamenting the passing of summer. "I'm just not ready for summer to be over," he said.

"I started fishing again. ... I'd like to go biking," said Boger, who will turn 18 on Tuesday.

### 'I pray for him'

For Kate Lonerger, 17, being slashed in the face during the April attack gave her the unlikelyst of gifts.

She learned about forgiveness. "I forgave Alex right away. ... I pray for him and for his family," said Lonerger, who has a faint scar from the attack. "I think about how grateful I am to be alive."

Lonerger filled her summer with dancing studies and a mission trip to Rochester, N.Y.

Like Boger, she is ready to go back to school. "I'm excited. It's my senior year," she said.

She plans to attend Grove City College to major in secondary education. She eventually wants to teach chemistry.

Despite all that has happened, Lonerger believes her school is a safe place.

"I've always felt safe there, still do," she said. "I'm not scared to go back."

Junior Kolden Cook, 16, said he walked away from the attack with stitches in his back, but the life lesson he learned from the attack will stay with him long after



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Kolden Cook, 16, said he walked away from the attack in Franklin Regional Senior High School with a life lesson that will stay with him long after his wounds have healed. "Everything is always changing. You have to be ready, hope you can handle it and become a better person from it," he said.

the wound has healed.

"Everything is always changing. You have to be ready, hope you can handle it and become a better person from it," said Cook, who was stabbed between his shoulder blades.

He has vowed not to spend time thinking about his attacker.

"The rest of his life is pretty much over. He won't have an effect on me now," Cook said.

### In search of normal

School district officials are hoping the start of this school year will be as normal as possible. Counselors will not be on site but will be available immediately if needed.

"Our students are really looking to do their best to move on," Reljac said. "We see it as the new beginning."

Experts in school crisis response and mental health from across the country have been working with the district since the attack to offer support and advice, she said.

"Our goal is to make sure that we try our best to support the entire school community," Reljac said.

"We already have had 'typical' school days," she said, referring to the time immediately after the attacks when students returned to school.

Teachers returned on Monday, and incoming freshmen visited the school during the last week of the 2013-14 school year as part of the normal annual acclimation visit, she said.

Still, counselors were concerned about how freshmen would react.

"It's a stressful time going to high school as it is, but it's an added stress," said Diane Stanoszek, director of children's community-based services with Milestone Centers Inc.

A common theme during counseling sessions with middle schoolers was a fear of walking in the hallway, but Stanoszek said many students showed resilience.

"The parents were more nervous and anxious than the kids," she said.

Returning students and faculty likely will face a variety of feelings, depending on their involvement in the attack, said Ray Grabowski, director of behavioral health services for Excelsa Health.

Reljac said the district is prepared to deal with whatever those feelings might be.

"It didn't define us when it happened," she said. "We're going to do our best to have a typical school year."

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