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Seattle Loses Beloved Business Owner D'Vonne Pickett Jr.

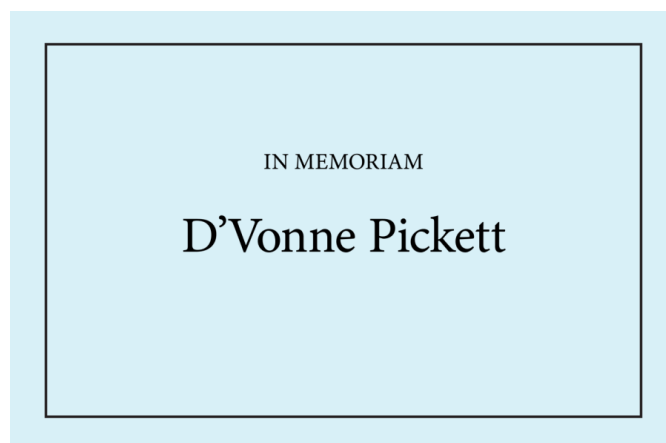
James Argento-McCurdy, Staff Reporter

Bouquets stretch across The Postman's shopfront and extend into the parkway strip off Martin Luther King Way and East Union St.; poems, messages and candles broaden the commemoration to the curb. Melted candle wax from consecutive nights of mourning congeal before the shop's door—Seattle is grieving.

D'Vonne Pickett Jr., 31, father of three and owner of The Postman—a shipping service located in Seattle's Central District—was shot and killed outside his business Oct. 19.

Around 6:30 p.m., Pickett Jr., along with his wife and business partner, KeAnna Pickett, arrived at The Postman. As Pickett Jr. reached the entrance of his shop, shots rang out behind a nearby bus stop, according to local news sources. KeAnna Pickett, who was sitting in the car, rushed to aid her husband while calling 911. When officers arrived, Pickett Jr. lay on the sidewalk, suffering multiple gunshot wounds. The officers provided aid until Seattle Fire Department medics arrived and rushed Pickett Jr. to Harborview Medical Center where he died due to his injuries.

Ashton Lefall, 31, was arrested in his apartment Oct. 20 and indicted Oct. 24 after a spate of violent crimes including the murder of Pickett Jr.. Once childhood friends, Lefall harassed Pickett's family online and over text for two years. Pickett Jr. filed a police report detailing how Lefall had unyieldingly tormented his family and himself, Sept. 9—eight days after Lefall showed up at The Postman before being ousted by an employee. Lefall is currently detained, awaiting an arraignment scheduled for Nov. 7.



Luca Del Carlo

Weeks laden with tragedy, however, show no signs of abating. Joyce Hosea owns and operates a local business in the same complex as The Postman.

“The building has this whole gray cloud over it,” Hosea said. “You just can’t make sense of something like this.”

Pickett Jr. was born and raised in Seattle, spending much of his youth in the Central District. As a young man, he made a name for himself as a standout basketball player at Rainier Beach high school. After graduation, Pickett Jr. played point guard for a junior college in Arizona before receiving a scholarship from Seattle University. From 2012 to 2014, Pickett Jr. played point guard for the Redhawks while earning a communications degree. Professors noticed that he found ways to excel on the court while making an impact in the classroom.

“I saw D’Vonne grow into a leader in his small groups and a strong, positive voice in the classroom.” Christopher Paul, professor of communications at Seattle U, wrote to The Spectator. “He became an active and engaged participant who helped facilitate learning for those around him.”

Four years after graduating from Seattle U, Pickett Jr. opened The Postman in honor of his great-grandfather Jacques Chappell, who worked as a USPS mail carrier in the Central District for 37 years. An outline of Chappell—looking over his shoulder as he busily fills out a routing slip—serves as The Postman’s emblem. Inside the shop, Chappell’s USPS jacket hangs beside the countertop.

The shop’s consistent dedication to family-style connection reaches far beyond their logo, supporters say. If the outpouring of collective heartache, public remembrances and financial support offer any indication, the family-owned, operated and inspired business embodies the maxim emblazoned in its window: “Keeping Community Connected.”

“[The Postman is] bigger than us. It’s about everybody here,” Pickett Jr. told the Capitol Hill Blog during the grand opening of the shop in the summer of 2018.

As The Postman opened its doors, the Central District was preparing for a redevelopment project on 23rd Avenue and Union St. that ultimately left the neighborhood without a USPS post office for 20 months. During the nearly two-year absence of USPS shipping services, Pickett Jr. and his staff provided Central District residents with essential local postal services. This was yet another example, for those who knew Pickett Jr., of his stalwart dedication to the Central District—a neighborhood that’s undergone rapid waves of gentrification since the 1970s.

“He was an advocate for the community,” Hosea said. “He was an advocate for Black-owned business and small businesses, he was always trying to uplift the community in any way he could and to support Black people.”

De’Auz’janae Pickett, one of Pickett Jr.’s sisters, a friend of De’Auz’janae’s who preferred to go unnamed and three young children reignited candles and organized the growing collection of flowers outside The Postman, Oct. 26. As they worked, passing cars honked in solidarity; a young boy pushed himself through his passenger window to proffer shared grief. Those outside The Postman continued reigniting the sidewalk memorial—sometimes stopping a moment to take it in.

“He was everything for me, he was everything for our family, he was a pillar in the community,” De’Auz’janae Pickett said. “He was half man half amazing, I’ve never met someone so genuine and real.”