

ple didn't care for that. Some people glared at that. There were lots of children there, and they didn't know what was going on. I think that kind of muted (the service) a little bit. People didn't feel as free to express themselves."

One person who had a bad experience with the media at the prayer vigil was Lauria Baker, who works at the Church of Christ Student Center on the ASU campus. Baker is a close friend of Suzann Wilson, and her son was a playmate of Britthney Varner. Baker and her sister took their children to the prayer vigil, and someone told a photographer that she was a friend of one of the victims.

"He just kept flashing flashes in our eyes," Baker said. "At one point, I said, that's enough, but he just kept going. We couldn't participate (in the vigil)."

Eventually, some ASU students formed a protective circle around Baker, her sister and their children so they could pray. "[Photographers] were just trying to get a prize picture of people in pain," she said.

At St. Bernards Regional Medical Center, where the dead and wounded were taken, hospital personnel set up a special briefing room for the media and began a series of regular briefings and condition updates. Family members of the victims were in a separate area, and the hospital laid down strict rules to protect the families and the patients from the media.

"The ground rules were basically, we're going to keep you updated, we're going to provide you with information as to that, but the hospital was off limits. The press were not allowed in the hospital, period," said Robert Beaton, the physician in charge of the emergency room when the victims started arriving.

Beaton knew of a few attempts by reporters to enter the hospital, including a TV crew that approached the hospital via a pedestrian bridge connected to a medical office building. But he couldn't identify the news organization involved.

The hospital's efforts, coupled with the attempts by Sadler and Sheriff Haas to provide accurate information to the media on the victims, kept misinformation to a minimum. Still, there were some errors as the story was breaking.

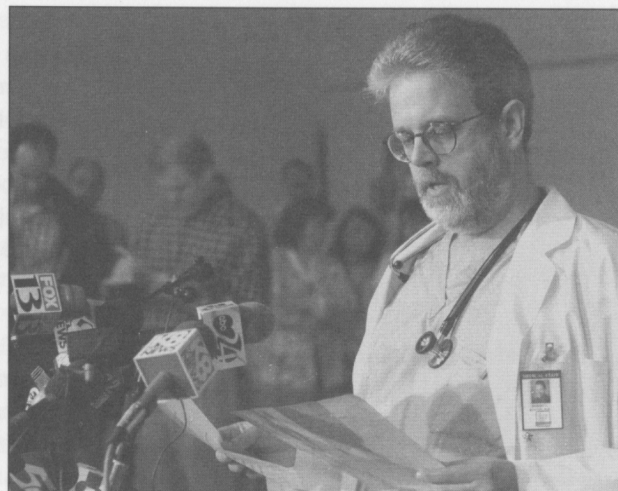
Some early reports said that several victims were taken to

Memphis for treatment. Beaton said he actually expected to send some victims to Memphis and had called a helicopter service for that purpose. A helicopter had landed on the roof of the Jonesboro hospital and was on alert, Beaton said, but it turned out there were enough surgeons on hand and enough operating-room capacity to handle all the cases. "It was just one of those things where one of the pieces of information was not correct ... but that's how it came about."

Mitchell Wright said he was told that a broadcast outlet reported that his wife had died in the afternoon, hours before she did. And *The Jonesboro Sun* reported on Wednesday morning that Shannon Wright was pregnant, an error that continues to surface.

"What happened there was, the surgeon called me (from the operating room) around 5 o'clock and said, 'Did you realize your wife was pregnant?' and I said I don't think so, I was not aware of that. Then he called back about 30 minutes later and said ... it was a false test (result)," Wright said.

But "the next morning it was out" that she was pregnant, Wright said. By 6:30 a.m., his answering machine picked up 25 media calls, all regarding the pregnancy angle, and those calls continued "every day until the funeral. At 6:30 in the morning, they'd start calling, and it was always the same thing. 'We're so sorry about what's happened. Our prayers are with you. Now could you tell me, was your wife pregnant?'"



David Stout, *The Jonesboro Sun*

**Dr. Robert Beaton: Reporters "knew what questions I could answer ... and I thought from our standpoint, from the medical standpoint ... they did a fairly good job of getting things right."**

**4:10 PM** KAIT, its truck now moved, goes live to Huddleston for details from Sadler's briefing.

**5:00 PM** KAIT's first evening news program airs. Davis leads the program with the death count and news of the arrests. The truck has moved again: A live report is made from St. Bernards Regional Medical Center.

Reporters continue to arrive in droves, now not only from regional but national news organizations. As *Jonesboro Sun* reporter Stan Mitchell later describes the hospital briefing room, "There were people just everywhere ... just swarming the hospital. The (media) room was free-flowing. You could come in and go as you wanted. And that's where the information was being given ... where they put up the huge board with names on it, and would list their conditions."

**5:30 PM** National evening network news programs begin. The killings top every newscast, with live reports from either the school or outside St. Bernards.

**7:00 PM** Network "magazine" news crews also are arriving. Quasi-news operations, such as the "Montel Williams Show," are setting up camp as well. The first international TV crews are arriving in Jonesboro.