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**Front Page** April 17, 2008

## Police make arrests in 'vicious' attack of student

Cell phone video ID'd suspects  
**BY MELISSA MCKEON MMCKEON@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM**



**State and local police patrolled Sunnyside Avenue and areas around Wachusett Regional High School on Tuesday afternoon after the final bell of the day. Steve King photo**

HOLDEN - One WRHS student from Holden is under arrest for assault and battery and more arrests were expected Thursday after police received a cell phone video showing half a dozen young people beating a Sterling teen near the grounds of Wachusett Regional High School Monday afternoon.

Holden Police were called to the scene of the fight on Sunnyside Avenue, which abuts the high school, just after the school day ended.

By the time police arrived prepared to encounter a melee, the fight was over. Police questioned students and then dispersed the crowd, Holden Police Chief George Sherrill said Tuesday.

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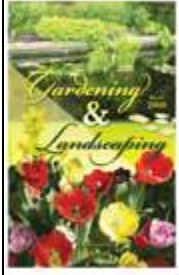
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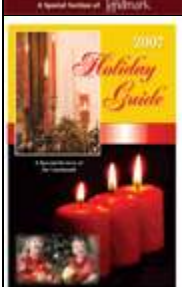
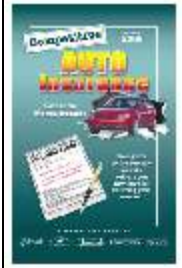
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"When we arrived there, initially, there were 15 or 20 kids milling about," Sherrill said. "Nobody came forward with any information at all. They made it sound like it was just a minor, minor skirmish."

Sherrill said assistant principals were also in the area as is customary at dismissal and came to the scene. The event occurred down the hill from the high school near a path regularly taken by students leaving WRHS to reach parked cars on Sunnyside Avenue.

Within an hour the picture of what



Holden Police Chief George Sherrill addresses TV news crews Tuesday about the assault on the Wachusett Regional High School student. Steve King photo

happened had changed. A student at the scene had taken a video of the event on a cell phone and that video was supplied to police, who were able to identify several suspects. As The Landmark went to press, students at the scene were being questioned.

The video can be viewed on the Holden Police Department Web site, and was shown on Fox News Monday night and Tuesday morning. The video also was posted on the popular Internet video forum YouTube that morning.

The student who was beaten is seen lying prone on the ground, but then is helped to his feet by another student, who was also assaulted as he helped the victim.

The victim later went to the hospital for treatment. Sherrill said his injuries involved bruises and lacerations, but no broken bones. The student who came to his aid was also injured, but Sherrill said

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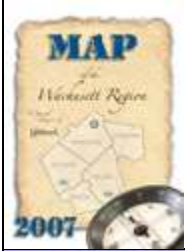
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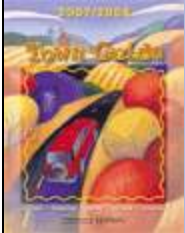
he was unsure of whether that student sought treatment.

Because both the victims and suspects are juveniles, police are not releasing their names.

The victim, who is shown in the video being beaten with sticks and pipes and being kicked, is a 16-year-old WRHS student from Sterling, Sherrill said, as is the student who came to his aid.



The student arrested Monday is a 15-year-old WRHS student from Holden. The second student police were attempting to locate and arrest Tuesday afternoon is a 16-year-old from Worcester who attends WRHS. Both face charges of assault and battery with a dangerous weapon.



Sherrill said other arrests can be expected. Police are attempting to enhance the video in order to aid in identification and are in touch with the Worcester District Attorney's office.



Sherrill said teens from Worcester who are not WRHS students may also have been involved in the fight. The motive for the attack was being investigated as The Landmark went to press.

The viciousness of the attack as recorded on the video is shocking, Sherrill said, especially given the high school's location across the street from the police station.

"It's more like what you'd expect to see in L.A. or New York," he said.

Sherrill said he expected to have a strong police presence at the high school on Tuesday to prevent further incidents.

In the video, students can be seen watching the attack, though few were willing to aid the victim or report the crime. Sherrill said there's no law that requires them to do so.

Superintendent Thomas Pandiscio said staff at the school were able to identify some of the students at the scene, who he believes knew beforehand that something was going to occur. He said staff

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are disappointed those students didn't alert them ahead of time.

But besides the disappointment, there are school and state laws that will come into play.

"A violation of school rules at the school level gives us only a certain amount of latitude to suspend," Pandiscio said Tuesday.

But state law could allow him to suspend some students until their court cases are concluded.

"My philosophy is to take the strongest legal remedy that you can," Pandiscio said. "I would hold these students to the highest extent of responsibility for what happened."

As the former WRHS principal, Pandiscio says he'd like to see the event used as a teaching moment for staff, one that involves frank discussions about what's happened. He said it's necessary to ask students the hard questions "about what kind of school they want, about what kind of society, what kind of environment they want to live in. Do they want to live in a society where such a vicious attack could occur?"

A Worcester minor turned himself in and was arraigned in Juvenile Court Tuesday, then released on \$2,500 bail with conditions, according to a court officer.