

Robber might have had partner
COLUMBIA AA SHOOTING

Columbia police are keeping secret the identity of the man who shot and killed an 18-year-old gunwielding robber Saturday night at a Five Points building used for **Alcoholics Anonymous** meetings.

Police said the shooter's life may be in danger if his name is disclosed, police spokesman Brick Lewis said Monday.

"There is a possibility he could be targeted," Lewis said.

Lewis said it did not appear to be a gang situation, but he declined to elaborate. He did say police are investigating whether the would-be robber had an accomplice.

A witness to some of the events reported seeing a white Lincoln Town Car with a vinyl roof and whitewall tires leaving the scene, according to a police incident report released Monday.

"At some point, we will make the name public, but we cannot tell you when," he said.

"He does not wish to speak to the media."

The man who shot and killed Kayson Helms is a 61-year-old white male who does not live in Columbia, according to the report. The names and some details were blacked out on the report because the investigation is ongoing, Lewis said. The man has a concealed weapons permit, which allows him to carry a hidden gun.

The report gave new information on the shooting death of Helms, 18, of Edison, N.J., 30 miles from New York City.

About 10:48 p.m. Saturday, Helms entered the Five Points building and told two people inside to "Give him what they got," the report said.

Helms drew the silver-colored, .25-caliber pistol from his waistband and pointed it at a male AA visitor.

Another visitor, a woman, told Helms she didn't have any money but had \$4 in her car.

The male visitor then emptied the contents of his pockets onto the floor.

At that point, another man - the 61-year-old AA visitor - "removed a (censored) pistol (censored) from his right rear pants pocket and "shot 3 to 4 rounds at the suspect striking him multiple times."

Helms then fled the building, ran up College Street, across railroad tracks, to Laurens Street. On the edge of the University Neighborhood that abuts USC, he collapsed on the sidewalk.

Police found what they said was Helms' pistol on the ground near where he fell. EMS took him to Palmetto Health Richland, where he was pronounced dead at 11:24 p.m. AA has no policy on visitors carrying concealed weapons, said an employee Monday who gave his name only as James and said he was a recovering **alcoholic**. AA members use only their first names.

ACOA is the name of the block building where the shooting took place. ACOA stands for A Corporation of **Alcoholics**, James said. It has been used as a gathering place for AA meetings since 1947. "ACOA owns the building, not AA," James said, but AA members use it seven days a week.

A city block from central Five Points - a bar, restaurant and shop scene that attracts a college and professional crowd - the ACOA building is the essence of obscurity.

The ACOA is a low-slung, onestory building surrounded by parking lots, 30 yards or so from a railroad track, on a dead-end street. It's the kind of place an **alcoholic** who

wanted help would seek out to maintain anonymity. However, many people in Columbia seem to know it's there.

Saturday's shooting featured a rare collision of values: the treasured anonymity of those who seek help at **Alcoholics Anonymous**, and the normal transparency expected when one person shoots and kills another.

James stressed to a reporter Monday that confidentiality is crucial to AA.

"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions," James said. Anonymity allows people to seek help who otherwise would not, he said. "There is such a stigma attached to alcoholism. People are terrified of anyone finding out they are a member of **Alcoholics Anonymous**."

The shooting took place in the club lounge, a room with a dozen comfortable chairs and two sofas, James said. AA members socialize in this room and use another room in back for meetings.

Despite the organization's confidentiality, an AA member who kills someone cannot expect his name to be kept secret, said media attorney and USC law professor Jay Bender.

Full disclosure allows the public to have confidence in the concealed weapons law and that police handled the investigation properly, said Bender, who specializes in media law and First Amendment issues. Among his clients are The State newspaper and the South Carolina Press Association. The State newspaper is a member of the press association.

"Self-defense does not entitle him to anonymity," Bender said. "He has acted in a public fashion, so who is he?" He added, however, that if police have a legitimate reason to fear for the man's life, they could withhold his identity for a limited time. Solicitor Barney Giese said through a spokeswoman Monday he is waiting for police to give him a full report on the incident before deciding whether the AA visitor broke any laws.

A New Jersey phone number listed for Helms on the police report had been disconnected.