

Nashville, Tennessee warehouse worker shoots three where he worked

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An early morning workplace shooting by an employee at a SmileDirectClub facility near Nashville, Tennessee, has left three employees wounded and the alleged shooter dead.

The Tuesday shooting, which has yet to be explained, occurred during a 6:00 a.m. shift change of workers at the warehouse, located in the Nashville suburb of Antioch. The company sells and services teeth-straightening and aligning devices.

All three victims were hospitalized, with one in critical condition.

Nashville police identified the alleged shooter as 22-year-old Antonio D. King. They said police officers shot and killed him near the warehouse when he pointed his gun at them.

Two of those shot were security guards, while the third was a SmileDirectClub employee, according to WKRN News 2.

Security guard Johnny Hardin, 46, was listed in critical condition at a local hospital, while his partner, Carlton Watson, 66, was in stable condition, local media reported. Thomas Abbott, 54, described as a manager, was also wounded but was treated and released.

King had started working at the company in June, after having previously worked there between late 2019 and early 2020, according to *The Tennessean* newspaper.

The SmileDirectClub employs about 700 workers on 12-hour shifts at the facility in Antioch, a working-class neighborhood. According to the *Nashville Business Journal* (NBJ), the 131,487-square-foot factory is operated by Access Dental Lab, a subsidiary of Nashville-based SmileDirectClub.

The plant opened in June of 2018 and now operates 24 hours per day. There are plans to add an additional

100 employees at the facility by what the NBJ describes as one of Middle Tennessee's largest publicly traded health care companies, with \$657 million of revenue in 2020.

"The company is also constructing a new 168,406-square-foot factory in Columbia, Tennessee, dubbed the SmileFarm, giving SmileDirectClub more than 300,000 square feet of manufacturing space in Middle Tennessee," the NBJ wrote. "Construction on the SmileFarm is expected to be completed in the fall of 2021."

Workers at these new facilities can expect to be paid the same poverty wages and experience the same uncertain and mind-numbing work as other SmileDirectClub hourly workers and workers in similar operations, such as Amazon.

Nashville in recent years has promoted itself as the "It" city, with promises of huge tax incentives for corporations looking for a business-friendly home. SmileDirectClub, headquartered in Nashville, was promised \$10 million in June of 2019.

The city and state pledged \$103 million to Amazon for a regional distribution hub, while Oracle Corporation will receive millions for its downtown campus. Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) received a million dollars for furniture, which HCA used to purchase a Guitar Pick Table for \$4,190.18 and a Tuxedo sofa for the executive lounge area that cost \$6,540.45.

According to the *Nashville Business Journal*, the state owes more than \$1 billion in corporate tax incentives.

SmileDirectClub workers and "manufacturing specialists" can expect \$14.39 and \$14.77 an hour, respectively, according to indeed.com. A production "technician" can expect to start at \$15.19 an hour, and a packer can expect a few pennies more.

In Nashville, it takes almost twice that much, \$60,000 plus a year, for a single person to live comfortably, the *Nashville Business Journal* has reported.

At this point, the motive for the shooting is unknown. But it is reasonable to assume that the conditions of the alleged shooter's life—the pandemic, poverty wages, the lack of future prospects—played a role in his mental state.

From former workers' reports, working for SmileDirectClub was nothing to smile about.

“Unpaid furlough for a good portion of the company due to COVID and then laid off 4 months later,” a former Nashville employee reported to indeed.com in October of last year. “Leadership micromanages and treats employees horribly. You will work long hours and be expected to answer emails at all hours. The culture is beyond toxic. Overworked, underpaid, undervalued, not appreciated. ... The main goal is about money and not the patient's actual well-being.”

SmileDirectClub workers are likely being driven during their grueling 12-hour shifts to produce more and more to increase dividends for investors. The company's economic position has been slipping, according to one financial source.

“Our research shows that certain hedge funds do have great stock-picking skills (and we can identify these hedge funds in advance pretty accurately), so let's take a glance at the smart money sentiment towards SmileDirectClub, Inc.,” *Yahoo Finance* reported.

“SmileDirectClub, Inc. has seen a decrease in activity from the world's largest hedge funds lately. SmileDirectClub, Inc. was in 21 hedge funds' portfolios at the end of the first quarter of 2021. Our calculations also showed that SDC isn't among the 30 most popular stocks among hedge funds.”

We may never know what drove the assailant. But because of the police shooting, the investigation will be conducted by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, an agency black hole that has been known to take more than a year to complete an investigation of a police shooting, without having to release any information to the public.



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