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John DeCubellis [at lectern] presents the URI Athletic Department with a \$100,000 check to help fund the construction of a student-athlete development center. Receiving the check are Athletic Director Thorr Bjorn and URI student Ryan McCarthy.

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## DeCubellis Foundation pledges \$100,000 for student-athlete development center

**By: Bridgette Blight**

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04/09/08 - The Katie DeCubellis Memorial Foundation pledged \$100,000 toward the construction of a student-athlete development center on Monday night.

John and Meg DeCubellis lost their daughter Katie and her best friend's mother, Marsha Bowman, after a drunken driver plowed into their car on Oct. 29, 1999. The DeCubellis family started the KDMF to raise awareness about the consequences of driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

On Monday night, they spoke to an audience at Keaney Gymnasium composed mostly of student athletes. Their presentation started before any words were spoken to the audience. Easels with pictures of Katie were on display. As the DeCubellis family spoke, they revealed a photo of Katie DeCubellis's coffin at her funeral, as well as the wreckage of the Honda Civic she was riding in the night she was killed.

"We want to show the daily pain and anguish that Meg and I experience," John DeCubellis said. "We hope it might help you make good decisions."

The couple discussed the details of the crash that killed their daughter, as well as the impact it had on their lives. They left her room exactly as she left it the day that she died for six years until their youngest child Eliza, who was four when Katie died, moved into it.

They spoke of the pain that they felt every day, but also of the way that they decided to push for a greater awareness of the effects of drunken driving. The DeCubellis family speak across the country, and KDMF offers scholarships to Rhode Island students in Katie DeCubellis's memory. On Monday night, they encouraged URI student-athletes to set a good example for their fellow students.

"Whether you like it or not ... you're role models to a lot of people," John DeCubellis said. "You have to be extra careful and extra aware because you're representing our community."

The audience saw the second video in a three-part educational video series made by KDMF. The video showed Katie DeCubellis's family and friends reflecting on life without her. Becky Bowman, who survived the crash, read the inscription that she wrote in Katie's yearbook. At the time that the video was

made, Bowman was a senior in high school. She is now a senior at Roger Williams University in Bristol, and has also spoken about the impact of the accident on her life.

After their presentation, John and Meg DeCubellis opened up the floor for questions. Students asked if the DeCubellis had any contact with Stephen Reise, the Jamestown man who collided into Marsha Bowman's car on Route 4 in East Greenwich that night.

"He didn't want anything to do with the video project," Meg DeCubellis said. "We try to keep the door open, and he slams it." In February, Reise requested a continuance for his parole hearing after the DeCubellis and members of Becky Bowman's family testified to the parole board.

"Forgiveness is something he has to earn," John DeCubellis said. "He has to show responsibility. He has not earned forgiveness."

When asked how they dealt with the anger, John DeCubellis said that he and his wife don't have the strength and energy to be angry. While thinking about an answer to the question, Meg DeCubellis became emotional. If Katie DeCubellis were alive today, she would be a senior in college, Meg DeCubellis said with tears in her eyes.

"Being on a college campus and seeing the kids she grew up with ... it's a deeper level of sadness. The fact is, every day it cements a little more that she's not here."

The DeCubellis encouraged the audience to consider the consequences of their actions before making decisions, especially decisions involving drugs and alcohol.

They ended their visit to URI on a positive note by presenting a check for their \$100,000 pledge to Athletic Director Thorr Bjorn. John DeCubellis complimented his alma mater's student-athletes on their sportsmanship while presenting the donation.

"You guys never give up ... you are tremendous and an incredible inspiration," he said.

The center, however, faces a somewhat uncertain future as a bill before the General Assembly would rescind the law authorizing its construction. Lawmakers had been scheduled to discuss the bill last night but postponed the hearing until April 22.

The DeCubellis foundation's pledge is part of the Making a Difference Campaign that aims to raise \$100 million for the university's endowment.

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