

Bonfires, doves help honor memories of car-crash victims

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* Katie DeCubellis's and Marsha Bowman's families are appreciative of the sentiments mourners have shared since a car crash claimed them both.

NARRAGANSETT - "Twenty-three days ago at this moment, our lives were very different."

Russ Kraines, a social studies teacher at the Narragansett Pier School, told nearly 200 friends and relatives of Marsha Bowman and Katie DeCubellis that no one could have expected the tragedy that would take their lives that night.

But in the 23 days since the car accident police say was caused by a driver who was under the influence of drugs and alcohol, the community here has rallied behind Bowman's husband and children and the 13-year-old DeCubellis's parents and siblings. Katie DeCubellis was a passenger in a car driven by Bowman when it was struck from behind on Route 4 in East Greenwich.

Yesterday afternoon, the Narragansett Youth Task Force set up five bonfires on Narragansett Beach to honor their memory. The group also released two dozen doves, representing peace, life, and the home to which speakers at the gathering said DeCubellis and Bowman had returned.

The event also served as a petition drive for Pier School eighth graders Patrick McSally and Rainer Hienerwadel. Since the accident, the pair have been collecting signatures from people who want stiffer punishments for drunken drivers and underage drinkers.

The petition will go to the state attorney general's office.

"You think twice more if you're going to get prosecuted a lot more," McSally, who worked on the school yearbook with DeCubellis, said yesterday. McSally said he had not yet counted the signatures.

Students have also written individual letters to the attorney general's office, and several of them were on display at the beach. Ashlee Nicole Clark wrote that the accident "strikes me like a thousand knives" and asked that the driver responsible spend the rest of his life in prison.

Stephen Reise, 39, of Jamestown, has been charged with eight felony counts in connection with the accident — two counts of driving while intoxicated, death resulting; four counts of driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, resulting in personal injury; and two counts of driving to endanger, resulting in death.

Nancy Devaney, executive director of the youth task force, said students at the Pier School will soon start a chapter of Students Against Destructive Decisions, formerly Students Against Driving Drunk.

As the fires burned down yesterday, John DeCubellis thanked onlookers at the beach for their help and shrugged off praise for his and his wife Meg's ability to get through the tragedy.

"We're not displaying any strength," he said. "We're feeding off all of you."

Marsha Bowman's husband, Bob, fought back tears when he took the microphone.

"Thank you for all the support you've given to my family," he said. "Thank you very much for the warm meals you've been bringing to our house. It brings some warmth into the house."

Meg DeCubellis later said she stopped being surprised at the community's support after Katie's wake, during which she and her husband spent nine hours receiving nearly 3,000 people. Hundreds returned the next day for her funeral.

"The impact she had at 13 on people — and Marsha as well — is just incredible," she said.
