

Fundraiser honors girl killed in crash

BYLINE: DOUGLAS STEINKE

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SCITUATE - More than 50 women, many with their grade-school-age daughters in tow, inspected Christmas ornaments up for a raffle at a holiday get-together in the North Scituate Community House yesterday.

Holiday music, such as White Christmas, wafted from speakers at the rear of the room.

Kathy Lee, an organizer for the event, baked cookies and area businesses donated more food for the holiday festivities.

There was indeed good tidings and joy for all, but behind the raffle stood a sobering cause. The money about \$900 is headed for the Katie DeCubellis Memorial Fund to honor the 13-year-old girl who was killed in October of last year when the car in which she was riding was struck by a drunken driver on Route 4 in East Greenwich.

Lee, who lives in North Scituate and grew up in Warwick with DeCubellis's mother, decided to hold the fundraising raffle instead of hosting the holiday party she holds each year.

I just thought that this year I'd put a party together where people bring ornaments and then hold a raffle, Lee said. I may do this every year and give the money to a different cause each time.

Lee and her three sisters, Gail Miller, Jennifer Geronaitis and Diane Croteau, organized yesterday's event.

More than 50 ornaments in all sat on a table: angels, Santas, blown-glass balls and stars of Bethlehem. The table's centerpiece also up for grabs in the raffle was a Nuremberg Angel, a sculpted wax doll whose origins can be traced back 300 years.

According to the legend, a German dollmaker named Balthasar Hauser made the first such sculpture after his own daughter died suddenly, Lee said. After Hauser's daughter died, he dreamed that he had seen her dressed as an angel. The next day he sat down to sculpt what he had seen.

Lee's mother, a U.S. government worker in Butzbach, Germany, brought the doll, made in the tradition of the original, to Rhode Island on a recent trip.

It's kind of a symbolic thing without being too morbid, Lee said, because if you think about it too much it's sad, and today is meant to be a happy day.

Meg DeCubellis, Katie's mother, who attended yesterday's raffle, said her family has received incredible support since her daughter was killed on the way to the mall with a friend last year. The friend's mother, Marsha Bowman, was driving and was also killed when a car driven by Stephen M. Reise rammed into Bowman's Honda Accord, sending it across the median and into oncoming traffic on Route 4.

Earlier this year, Reise was sentenced to 14 years in prison and 15 years' probation. It was the second-longest sentence ever handed out in Rhode Island under a plea bargain involving charges of driving under the influence with death resulting.

In many ways, Katie's death mobilized Meg DeCubellis and her husband, John, a lawyer and municipal judge in Narragansett. The couple formed the foundation in honor of their daughter, which they hope will raise enough money to build a community center in Narragansett. They've also become formidable in the fight against drunken driving.

The DeCubellis urged the General Assembly to make drunken-driving laws more stringent, ultimately resulting in the lowering of the state's legal blood-alcohol level to .08. Meg DeCubellis became vice president of the Rhode Island chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Much of the work to fight drunken driving, she says, still has to be done. The lowering of the blood-alcohol limit in Rhode Island was a victory, but a Pyrrhic one.

We still feel we really need stricter penalties, she said.

Just trying to get the word out about drunken driving is time-consuming.

A lot of the teenagers and younger kids have heard about it at school and are OK, she said. But the adult population is sort of harder to get to. They'll say, 'I've been doing this all my life, it's OK.' But it's not OK.

Yesterday, at least for a little while, DeCubellis took a break to stand next to the Christmas tree to enjoy a cup of coffee.

And, of course, to help out with the raffle.

* DONT LOOK: Hannah Miller pulls a number out of a bag to select the winner of a Christmas ornament during a fundraising raffle to benefit the Katie DeCubellis Memorial Fund at the North Scituate Community House yesterday.

Journal photo/ANDREW DICKERMAN

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