

Teen killed in subway accident remembered

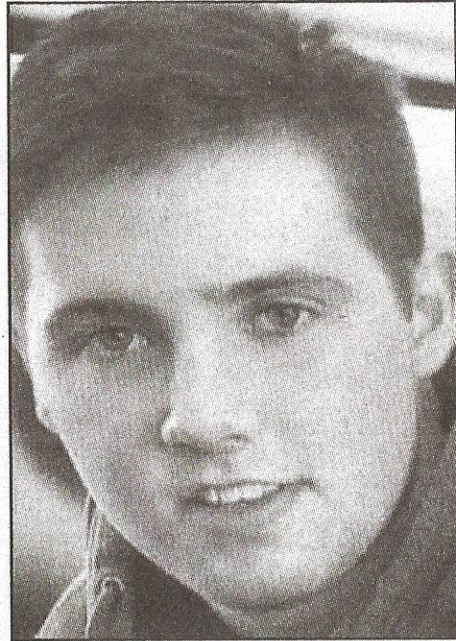
By COREY ADWAR

Friends, family and classmates of Liam Armstrong, a Smithtown High School East senior who died in a tragic March subway accident, will gather at Smithtown East Friday, June 7 to celebrate Liam's life and break ground on improvements to the courtyard of the high school's commons dedicated in Liam's name.

The event will feature a groundbreaking ceremony at 5 p.m. at the Smithtown High School East Commons, followed by a cookout on the school's north lawn with a DJ, barbecue, inflatables, games, face painting and other activities to help raise money for the makeover in the commons.

Liam's March 26 death after he was struck by a subway train while attempting to cross the tracks in New York City with friends left the Smithtown community and school district shocked and saddened by the loss of the popular, widely respected student.

The Smithtown Children's Foundation Tristin's Wish is spearheading the makeover in the outdoor courtyard area of the Commons, which Co-Executive Director Chris Fitzgerald said will likely include a bench, plaque, plantings, pavers to replace concrete, new picnic tables and beautification of the existing pond. At the 5 p.m. ceremony June 7, the new bench and plaque will be displayed and dedicated in honor of Liam so that his classmates, school staff and Liam's three younger siblings will be able to associate a special spot on school



Liam Armstrong

grounds with their memories of Liam.

"We thought it'd be nice for Liam's siblings to be able to come through there and take pride that it was done in honor of their brother," said Ms. Fitzgerald, who has a daughter attending Smithtown High School West and didn't know Liam and his family prior to the March tragedy.

The Smithtown Children's Foundation began in 2008 to raise funds to benefit the daughter of Ms. Fitzgerald's neighbor, who was diagnosed with neuroblastoma. The organization grew with its efforts, eventually securing nonprofit status in order to help other local families and raise additional funds to award

yearly scholarships throughout the Smithtown School District in the names of passed loved ones. Tristin's Wish is another organization that has combined with the Smithtown Children's Foundation and grants wishes to afflicted children and their families in memory of three-year-old Tristin Hart, who died of a bacterial infection. Ms. Fitzgerald said Susan Hart, the mother of one of Liam's good friends and the founder of Tristin's Wish, approached her with the idea of organizing a community event in honor of Liam based on interest among his friends.

Adult tickets for the Friday, June 7 event are \$10 per person and \$5 for kids ten and under. Donations are gladly accepted and checks can be made payable to the Smithtown Children's Foundation, P.O. Box 799, Nesconset, NY 11767. T-shirts bearing the words "Stay Armstrong" will be sold at the event, and there will be a 50/50 raffle. Community members can become sponsors of various levels by donating anywhere from \$250 to more than \$2,000. To learn more about becoming a sponsor, getting involved or for any other inquiries, contact Chris Fitzgerald at 516-835-1219, email fitzybbcf@optonline.net or visit the Smithtown Children's Foundation Facebook page.

Liam's mother Barbara said the improvements to the Smithtown East Commons courtyard will provide solace to Liam's three siblings—Connor in tenth grade, Ian in sixth grade and Brigid in fourth grade—who will each graduate from Smithtown East in the coming years. "It will be something

they'll be able to enjoy," Ms. Armstrong said in an interview this week. "They'll be able to see something that was done in memory of their brother. It sounded like a wonderful idea. My son [Liam] really loved the outdoors, so I thought it was a wonderful idea because he would have really enjoyed the space. He would have been out there all the time."

Ms. Armstrong described her and her husband Chris' oldest son Liam as a sociable, funny and active young man who enjoyed playing lacrosse and football in high school and snowboarding and jetskiing for fun. "He was happy, he was outgoing, he was friendly, athletic and he loved being outside," she said. "He really had a very diverse group of friends, that was something that I noticed about him, his friends came from all over. He was friends with girls, he was friends with boys, that was what he really enjoyed, he really enjoyed being with other people."

"I'm looking forward to the event. I'm very happy about it, we're all looking forward to it. A lot of our family is coming and a lot of our friends," Ms. Armstrong said.

This year, the Smithtown Children's Foundation will begin awarding in Liam's name two needs-based \$500 scholarships for one graduating senior at Smithtown East and a graduating senior at Smithtown West facing financial difficulties. "I feel like we're helping heal hearts, we're helping families get closure and feel like they may have lost a loved one but at least there's good coming from it," said Ms. Fitzgerald of the foundation's scholarships.



NEVER FORGET: Suffolk County Legislator Lynne Nowick (13th District), a Smithtown High School East graduate like Liam, speaks to Liam's mourning classmates at the Friday, June 7 cookout fundraiser.

School community remembers fallen classmate

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with classmates from many different cliques. "From talking to you guys about him one thing that impresses me most about Liam is no matter who you talk to, he was friends with them," Mr. Thompson said.

Ms. Walsh unveiled a bench donated to the school and dedicated in memory of Liam. She read aloud the inspiring message inscribed on an attached plaque with Liam's name, the year and the words: "In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years." The bench will be installed in the Smithtown East Commons area during the summer and remained displayed in the high school's main cafeteria throughout the cookout.

She recognized the efforts of Smithtown East senior Tyler Vigliarolo, of Nesconset, and Mary Keneally, owner of NexCycle Studio in St. James, which hosted a five-day spin-a-thon fundraiser in mid-April to help raise money for the Smithtown East Commons improvements in Liam's honor and two \$500 needs-based scholarships awarded last week to a graduating Smithtown East and West senior. "He was never judgmental, he listened to everything you had to say and when you went through an experience he went through it too," said Tyler of his friend Liam in an interview after Friday's ceremony. "He had a full heart."

In addition to working with Ms. Walsh to organize and promote the spin-a-thon fundraiser, Tyler also helped organize and run Friday's cookout fundraiser. As early as elementary school, Tyler said he and Liam shared plans for how they would make a difference in the world when they grew up. They stayed close friends as classmates and football teammates in high school. When Tyler heard the news that Liam had lost his life in

the tragic subway accident, he said he spent the next half hour in shock and disbelief as he called friends and sorted through rumors. "When it first happened, I felt like I left my body for a second and I said there is no way this is true," Tyler recalled.

"I think it's just amazing that Smithtown backs everyone who goes through a hard time. It's good that the Armstrongs can know there's always people to fall into and hold them up," Tyler said.

Liam's father Chris said the turnout at Friday's ceremony and cookout fundraiser was heartwarming. "It's very humbling, just like his wake and his funeral—the turnout there was extraordinary. I never anticipated anything like that. It was very humbling and very honoring. It was very nice. I think he [Liam] would have been bothered by all the fuss and all the attention," said Mr. Armstrong in an interview after Friday's ceremony.

Mr. Armstrong said all the attention and support from the school and community reflects the fact that Liam was friends with people from all different circles. "He was a kid full of life who loved to live each day to the fullest," he said.

Ms. Walsh's son Dakota, who was with Liam at the time of his death in the subway, ordered and erected the bench dedicated to Liam. Dakota, 17, of Nesconset, said the last time he erected a similar bench it was in honor of his 3-year-old cousin, Tristin Hart, who died suddenly from a rare strain of meningitis, and Liam helped him put the bench together. "It felt like I had to do it," said Dakota of the second bench he built in honor of Liam. "That's what it felt like, it felt like I had to do it for him [Liam]."

"This was the only thing to do that's actually something positive. Just being

here is good, it just shows his family how much it mattered," said Dakota, who said he and Liam were best friends since they met in second grade at Tackan Elementary. Back then, Dakota said, Liam was a new student and they met when Dakota defended Liam from a bully.

"All I can hope for is my son becomes a better man and does great things in spite of all of this, and I think he will

and I think he knows the important things in life now more than ever," said Ms. Walsh of her son Dakota.

"It's just amazing how the Smithtown community, as big as it is, always rallies behind someone who has a loss," said Smithtown School Board Trustee Chris Alcure, who helped volunteer at Friday's cookout with his wife Christina, a co-founder of the Smithtown Children's Foundation.

County out to bid for channel dredging

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of dredge work is deployment of the equipment.

Go the Spoils

During the 2008-2009 dredge of the Nissequogue River channel, the State of New York anted up \$500,000 to have the sediment being dredged out of the channel pumped a half mile to the west and spread across the public bathing beach at Sunken Meadow State Park. Mr. Hillman said this cycle

the state did not offer the \$500,000 for the dredge spoils and in the alternative the material will be pumped east and spread across Short Beach, a Town of Smithtown public bathing beach.

Mr. Hillman said the sediment being dredged from the Nissequogue River channel is of a fine quality for a bathing beach. The spoils being dredged from the Stony Brook Harbor channels will be pumped northwest to Long Beach, another town bathing beach.

King O'Rourke to host film premiere

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in Smithtown," he said.

Although Mr. King said the film is aimed more for mature audiences, he said it does not contain any graphic violence or sex. He said approximately 100 people have sent RSVPs so far and he encourages anyone interested in attending to RSVP as soon as possible to Barbara@kingorourke.com.

Mr. Rizzuto will donate all the proceeds at the premiere to the Reporters Without Borders for Freedom of Information organization. He said that organization's advocacy for journalists and opposition to censorship is very

important to him as a photojournalist and current work as a news station cameraman. "Maybe eventually I'd like to get into doing this commercially, but I just wanted to do it as its own thing and at the same time Reporters Without Borders is very important to me," he said.

According to Mr. Rizzuto, The Afterlife was shot in the span of a year and finished a couple of weeks ago with a small crew. He said the film's budget was \$5,000, \$3,000 of which was raised on the Kickstarter crowd funding website, and the soundtrack features local bands from the New York City area.

Hi Christine,

Thanks so much
for the oil & fixing
the furnace, It's
nice to turn up the
heat on a chilly night.
Have great holidays.
Thanks,