

Lafayette Class of '02 starts scholarship fund

It's a way to honor deceased former classmates

By **MARY SHAPIRO**
STAFF WRITER

In honor of three of their former classmates who have passed away, Lafayette High School's Class of 2002 has created a brighter future for three members of the Class of 2008.

The first Class of 2002 Memorial Scholarships were awarded to seniors Alex Johnson, Jessica Motz and Jasmine Cross during Senior Awards Night April 23 at the Wildwood school.

The scholarships honor three 2002 Lafayette graduates who have passed away: Ryan Trigg, Eric Gabel and Bobby Maessen.

"As the Class of 2002 was planning our five-year reunion last summer, the idea of having some sort of scholarship available in honor of Ryan, Eric and Bobby was brought up," said Jill McDonnell, Class of 2002 scholarship chair, who grew up in Ellisville but now lives in Chicago.

"Ryan passed away in November of 2004, Eric in June of 2006 and Bobby in February 2007. As my class had sat side-by-side in school with these boys for years, their loss was still fresh to us, and we decided we had a unique opportunity for some good to come out of such tragedy."

So, in addition to the invitations Class of 2002 graduates received, inviting them to their reunion, McDonnell also enclosed a letter explaining the purpose and goals of the



RICK GRAEFE PHOTO

The first Lafayette High Class of 2002 memorial scholarships were awarded to graduating seniors Alex Johnson, Jessica Motz and Jasmine Cross during senior awards night April 23 at the school. From left are Alex, Jasmine, Jill McDonnell of the Class of 2002, and Jessica.

scholarship fund.

Due to the generosity of her classmates, three \$500 scholarships were awarded to the three graduating Lafayette seniors.

"Students applying for Ryan's scholarship had to be involved with ROTC, as he was; students applying for Eric's scholarship had to attend Rockwood schools (from grades kindergarten to 12), like he did; and students applying for Bobby's scholarship had to show Christian values through leadership, just as Bobby did," McDonnell said.

Scholarship applicants also had to write an essay and

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include a letter of recommendation, she said.

Col. Michael J. Berenc, the Lafayette teacher who recommended the recipient for Trigg's scholarship, saw similar characteristics between Jasmine and Trigg, whom he had taught in his ROTC program.

"She reminds me of Ryan's dedication and serious approach to our classroom, his desire to succeed in life, and his love for his country," Berenc said.

The scholarship in honor of Gabel went to Jessica who, since the age of 16, has worked an average of 20 hours per week to finance her college education.

Wildwood resident Cathy Gabel, Eric's mother, said her son also was trying to finance his college education, while at St. Louis Community College at Meramec, at the time of his death from an acute bronchial asthma attack.

"When the class members contacted me in July of last year at their reunion and said they'd do this, I thought it was totally awesome," she said.

Also, counselor Jennifer Clark, who wrote the recommendation letter for Alex, Maessen's scholarship recipient, said she felt Alex will continue to carry on Maessen's passion to reach people through Lafayette's Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Clark knew Bobby and Alex, both of whom got involved with that organization.

"I admire both of them for their strength and exemplifying honorable and upright Christian values through school leadership," she wrote.

Rebecca Trigg of Ellisville, Ryan's mother, said scholarships are "a wonderful way to keep Ryan's name and memory alive."

"When a parent loses a child, the biggest fear is that the child will be forgotten; and the scholarships are a way to keep their memory alive," she said. "It's especially sweet that Ryan's friends and classmates made this possible."

Rebecca said Ryan was attending Southwest Missouri State University when his car

This is the first time a Lafayette graduating class has, as alumni, reached out to the school for this type of initiative, McDonnell said. She said she, the parents of Trigg, Gabel and Maessen, and the Lafayette faculty hope this inspires other classes to give back to the high school.

Cindy Maessen of Wildwood, Bobby's mother, said her son died of premature coronary artery disease after having heart attacks.

"We hope there are many years to follow of awarding the scholarships," she said. "We were touched that the kids themselves came up with the idea and that it's the first time this has been done by a class at Lafayette."

Bob Maessen, Bobby's dad, said, "Many students struggle these days with trying to obtain funds to pay for materials for their study, and these scholarships will make that easier."

Beth Brasel, a Lafayette college specialist in the College and Career Center, determined how students could apply for the scholarship, coming up with criteria and an essay question.

"Funds to start the scholarships are coming straight out of alumni members' own pockets," she said.

Parents of the students who died presented awards April 23.

"The scholarships are something the Class of 2002 hopes to continue to fund every year, to make a difference in kids' lives," Brasel said.

Tim Jones, Lafayette's senior class principal, said the school "wants to get our alumni involved more in any way we can in Lafayette, and this was a way to honor alumni who died way before their time."

"Their classmates thought enough of them to honor these fallen young people and to carry on their legacy in a tangible way," Jones said.

Jones praised the students receiving the scholarships.

"The parents of Ryan, Eric and Bobby had a lot of input in who, out of our 492 students in this year's graduating class, would get their children's scholarships," he said.

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Trigg



Gabel



Maessen

for student who will be attending the University of Missouri in Columbia, majoring in biology or microbiology.

"I thought it was neat the Class of 2002

came back to do that for their classmates," she said. "That was

really special."

Jessica will attend Kansas State University, where she will major in interior architecture.

"I felt very appreciative they chose me for the scholarship, and it's something I'll definitely cherish because it's in Eric's memory" she said.

Alex will attend Harding University in Arkansas.

"Actually, I'm friends with Bobby's little sister, Jackie, which made it really cool," he

The Lafayette High School Class of 2002 Memorial Scholarships organizers say having the support of alumni and local residents will enable them to offer the program for years to come.

Contributions to the effort can be sent to:

Class of 2002 Memorial Scholarship

in care of Beth Brasel

Lafayette High School

17050 Clayton Road

Wildwood, Mo. 63011

For more information about the scholarships or how to help, contact Jill McDonnell at mcdonnell.jill@gmail.com or (314) 378-1393.

ships," he said.

Jasmine is a voluntary trans-

said. "It was wonderful their family helped me in this way."

You can contact Mary Shapiro at mshapiro@yourjournal.com.