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SBHS grad starts chapter of the Gordie Foundation

Founded for Brett Griffin, who died of alcohol poisoning
BY MICHAEL ACKER Staff Writer

SOUTH BRUNSWICK — One South Brunswick High School alumna is hoping to curtail incidents of alcohol poisoning like the one that recently took the life of fellow class of 2008 graduate Brett Griffin.

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Griffin died of alcohol poisoning at the age of 18 during a fraternity party at the University of Delaware last month. He was pledging Sigma Alpha Mu when he died outside of campus in Newark, Del. Nov. 8.

Griffin kept in touch with fellow South Brunswick High School graduate Kelly VanDemark after graduation. The college freshmen knew each other since she moved to town in the eighth grade.

"He was totally not the type, I thought, to get into such a thing, because he was softspoken and quiet," VanDemark said.



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VanDemark remembers Griffin as a laidback, musically inclined individual who was dedicated to the wrestling team.

"He was very serious about wrestling," VanDemark said. "I don't think he ever missed a practice."

VanDemark is in the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences at Rutgers University. She is now the charter member of the Gordie Foundation at Rutgers. The foundation is named after Lynn Gordon Bailey Jr., who died at the age of 18 as a freshman at the University of Colorado.

"He died in a very similar fashion as Brett," VanDemark said.

She started the local chapter after donating to the Gordie Foundation in Griffin's memory. She noticed that Rutgers did not have a branch of the organization.

"I contacted them to see if I could start a chapter at Rutgers, which has a big Greek community," VanDemark said. "Primarily, this kind of incident happens mostly in the Greek community."

VanDemark said that this kind of incident is preventable and the goal of the Gordie Foundation is to spread awareness to students.

"It's cool, because I actually got to start a chapter," VanDemark said. "I had no idea so many people died because of this — 1,700 students every year — because of alcohol and hazing-related incidents."

VanDemark held a family-friendly tailgate party in the parking lot of North Brunswick Township High School at the annual Thanksgiving Day football game between North and South Brunswick. With the help of fellow students and concerned residents, she raised over \$500.

"I graduated with Brett and we were friends, so it was kind of my way to pay tribute," she said.

VanDemark noted that local businesses donated to the foundation as well, including Dunkin' Donuts, Pierre's Bakery, My Favorite Muffin, Panera Bread, Stop & Shop and Bagel Giant. She also thanked fellow South Brunswick class of 2008 graduates Jenna Bauer, Courtney Lanza, Matt Klayman and Ti Gillespie for their help.

The students used Facebook, an online social networking Web site, to spread the word to students and over 100 students came to pay respect to Griffin's memory.

She thanked PTO members as well, since they contributed generously after North Brunswick Township High School Principal Brian B. Brotschul got the word out. Brotschul said education on this topic is needed and the

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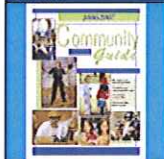
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Gordie Foundation has helped make important strides towards raising awareness of this issue.

"I was happy that both North Brunswick Township High School and South Brunswick High School were able to have a coordinated effort and I was happy and thrilled that we were able to host a tailgate before the football game," he said.

"That was really the coolest thing," Van-Dermark commented. "I thought that was awesome. [North Brunswick] didn't even know him, but because they know this is a problem, they came to show community awareness. My close friends helped me out with it and made posters. I think it was pretty successful. It was definitely worthwhile."

College students as well as high school students are the targets of this campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of hazing and alcohol abuse for college students.

"It's all about spreading awareness," VanDemark said. "It is not so much about the tailgating or the profit. This is about getting the kids to know this is a problem."