

METRO PULSE

Student Voice: Help change the drinking culture at CU

Honoring the legacy of Gordie Bailey

By Ramon de Jesus Rodriguez, For the Colorado Daily

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As college begins, four years may seem like an eternity.

To those of us who have lived them, they are all too often recalled as a time of bliss that was taken from us before we were ready.

For Lynn "Gordie" Bailey Jr., a student at the University of Colorado in 2004, they were taken away before he was ready. His four years were taken away before any of those who had the honor of knowing him were ready.

As a freshman here at CU, in three short weeks, he was able to touch students all around him. His gregarious attitude and uplifting smile made him a recognizable symbol on campus.

But he died alone in the lounge of the former Chi Psi fraternity house off campus after a night of binge drinking -- part of an initiation ritual.

Gordie's passing shook the foundations of our thoughts and our beliefs. Before I arrived on campus, it was my belief that death from alcohol only occurred when you drove while drunk. Gordie didn't drive. He died from acute alcohol poisoning.

I was never taught in school or told by my parents that too much alcohol could kill you. Others of us were taught that in health class, but somehow, it didn't seem real -- it didn't seem like it could really happen to us.

That fall, we all learned it could, the hard way. We also learned that out of tragedy came the hope and promise that something could be done to prevent another death.

Several students in the spring of 2005 came together to form the student group known today as G.O.R.D. (Guidelines and Objectives of Responsible Drinking).

They came together not only to educate others about the risks involved in binge drinking, but also to commemorate Gordie. G.O.R.D. began sharing Gordie's story and informing students about what they could do to prevent similar tragedies.

This educational effort began as an attempt to prevent deaths, but it has evolved into much more. Through research and discussion, G.O.R.D. realized this was not only a problem in Colorado, but across the country.

Young adults between the ages of 18-24 are dying in alcohol-related incidents at an alarming rate of an average 1,700 per year -- a number that should appall any student who reads this piece.

What causes these deaths?

A number of converging factors: Our apathetic view of blackouts, passing out, vomiting and total loss of control helps to drive these statistics. Such horrors have become routine, accepted.

The way we have injected competition into drinking is a factor -- playing dangerous games that lead us to drink too much, too fast.

The false idea that more alcohol means more fun, and the general sense that "it won't happen to me" underlie our culture of drinking.

Our hope as members of G.O.R.D. is that students will begin to realize that this needs to change, and that we are the ones to change it. This week and next, we will observe the fourth anniversary of Gordie's death and we invite all CU students to join us in the following observances:

Planting 6,800 flags on the Norlin Quad beginning today. The flags represent the number of people aged 18-24 who have died in alcohol related incidents since Gordie Bailey's death in 2004.

Attending one of the campus premieres of the documentary film "Haze," which examines the crisis of binge drinking on American college campuses using Gordie Bailey's death as a backdrop. It will be shown at 6 and 8 p.m. Sunday and 7:15 p.m. Tuesday in the ATLAS Auditorium

A panel discussion on alcohol issues at 7:15 p.m. Wednesday in the Glenn Miller Ballroom featuring Chancellor G.P. "Bud" Peterson; Dean of Students Deb Coffin; Jane Curtis, director of CU's alcohol and other drugs program; Gardiner Tucker, residence life director; and Victoria Garcia, UCSU tri-executive.

In addition to these activities, G.O.R.D. members also will be stationed on the Norlin Quad from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Wednesday distributing water and talking with students about binge drinking and the dangers of alcohol abuse.

But talking is only the beginning. G.O.R.D. hopes to create a permanent awareness among students that drinking does not have to be dangerous or even lethal.

Once that awareness takes root universally, then drinking responsibly can become reality, and a young man's life will not have been lost needlessly.

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