

MILESTONES

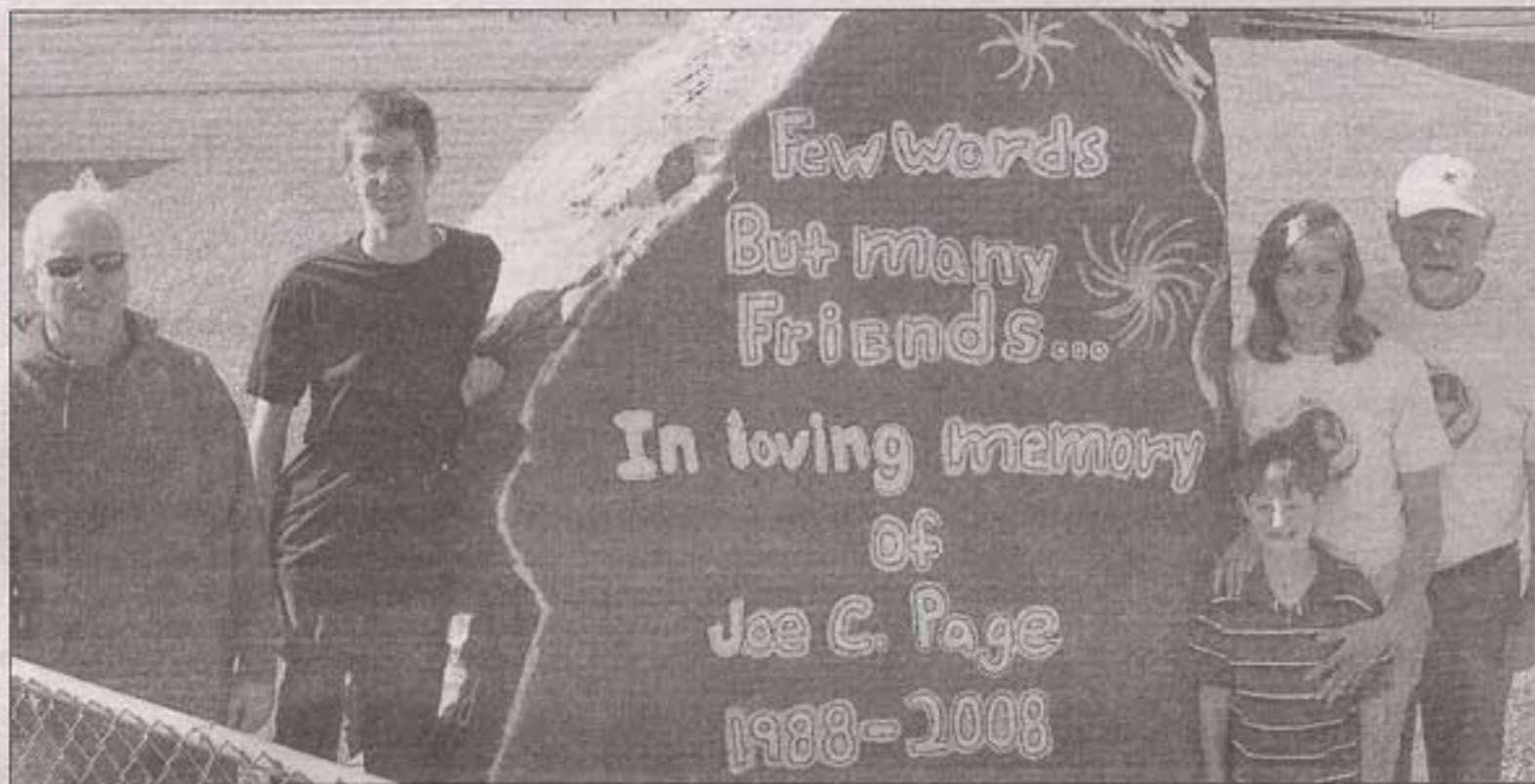
Joe Page's family turns tragic death into Joe 15 Team for improving community

By KRISTA KIMBLE
Observer staff

It is the most heart-wrenching experience a parent can suffer, receiving a phone call that one of your children was involved in a tragedy. On Feb. 3, 2008, while most people were watching the Giants' playing the Patriots in the Super Bowl, Debbie Page-Maples received such a call.

Maples' son, Joseph "Joe" Christopher Page, had been at a Super Bowl party in Manassas when he was the innocent victim of a gunshot. According to police reports, three allegedly uninvited guests showed up at the party; they were asked to leave after a fight broke out. The three later returned to the party and fired randomly into the house, striking Page, who had arrived after the earlier incident occurred. He did not know the three accused.

Joe was flown to Fairfax Hospital where he underwent five hours



Family and friends of Joseph Page, killed in Manassas in February 2008, preserve his memory by forming The Joe 15 Team, a community service club. From left are family members Bert Page, Michael Page, TJ Maples, Debbie Page-Maples and Jake Maples, surrounding a rock at Stonewall Jackson High School.

Krista Kimble / the Bull Run Observer

of surgery. Although he made it through the surgery, Joe, 20, died Feb. 7.

"During the four days that Joe

was in the hospital, he was in trauma ICU where no visitors except immediate family could be admitted," Page-Maples recalled.

"However, the hallway outside was continually lined with many of Joe's friends. Approximately 50 to 100 were there all the time."

Page-Maples remembered that at least 25 of these friends would spend the night in one of the waiting rooms. "It was just amazing to me," she said. "I occasionally sat with them, and they would tell me stories and remembrances of Joe. What I remember most was their warmth and compassion during that time."

After Joe's passing, Page-Maples found her thoughts constantly returning to those teens. "I kept thinking about them, and all of their energy and outpouring of emotion. I had a strong feeling that I wanted to do something with them, something connected to Joe and to preserving his memory. But I didn't know exactly what."

Then the Page-Maples family met the Rev. Jeffrey Carter of the Manassas Church of the Brethren. Carter offered his church as a spot for Joe's friends to gather for an evening of, in his words, "pizza,

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Joe 15 Team clubs now at SJHS, BDHS as teen community service idea grows

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basketball and remembering.”

It was during this time that his friends, together with Page-Maples, agreed they wanted to join together to honor Joe's legacy, something that would change the community and the world. The Joe 15 team was born.

“Fifteen was Joe's favorite number,” Page-Maples explained. “He said that the year he was 15 was the best year of his life. He chose 15 as a number whenever he could. It was a natural choice for the name.”

The Joe 15 Team quickly became all about community service and using the teens' talents and interests in positive ways. Since March, the Joe 15 Team has actively answered calls for help.

“At the time of the tragedy, many asked why? Why did this happen to Joe?” Carter wrote in a church newsletter. Then, the question changed to what can we do now?

For Page-Maples and her family, working with teens was a natural fit. She and her husband Jack raised a blended family and have been surrounded by teens for many years. The older children who still live in the area, as well as their son, T.J., 8, participate in many of the Joe 15 Team activities.

Some of the activities include volunteering at The Fairmont retirement home in Manassas, assisting with child care and food pantry at SERVE, adopting a section of highway, making and delivering about 100 cards per month to such places as the Juvenile Detention Center and coaching teams at the Manassas Boys' and Girls' Club.

The Joe 15 Team also held a blood drive with the American Red Cross and provided “victims” for a mock airplane crash at the Manassas Regional Airport. Some of the volunteers have participated at Prince William Hospital and nonprofits BARN and BEACON.

“If teens express an interest in something, whether it be working with children, animals, cooking or whatever, I find them a place where they can serve,” Page-Maples said. “We plan activities each month and have them sign up for the places where they are interested. They have been very responsible about showing up and fulfilling their obligations.”

“One of the most positive outcomes is watching teens realize that they don't have to be out there with friends getting into trouble but can work alongside their friends and have fun doing that,” she added.

In a few short months, the Joe 15 Team has become a nonprofit

organization with a board of directors. Institutions such as the Prince William County Court now recognize the group as a legitimate community service organization.

Page-Maples watched participation in The Joe 15 Team grow and recognized the positive impact the teens can have. She decided to take the club into high schools to be a community service club, recognized by Prince William County Schools.

As a benefit of joining the school club, teens will receive community service credit hours for their college applications and resumes, priority consideration for scholarships to Northern Virginia Community College and the self-confidence that comes with knowing they are making a difference in other lives, a brochure for the club states.

Stonewall Jackson High School, Joe's former high school, became the first school to start a Joe 15 Team Club; its kick-off meeting was Oct. 27. To Page-Maples' surprise, Brentsville District High School followed closely behind, holding its first Joe 15 Team meeting Oct. 29. “I'm very excited about Brentsville's club,” she said. “I had not considered that school originally because it had no connection to Joe. But, it's wonderful that they are on board.”

Brentsville junior Katelyn Wampler was the force behind bringing the club to her school. Wampler heard about the Joe 15 Team at her church, the Manassas Church of the Brethren. “My friends and I wanted to join some type of club at school, and there really weren't any available that fit our interests,” Wampler said. “I like to volunteer and be involved in the community, and The Joe 15 Team sounded exactly like what we wanted to do.”

A scholarship was established at NOVA in Joe's memory; he was a second year student there when he died.

Page-Maples has poured everything into the Joe 15 Team. “Obviously, Joe is my inspiration,” Page-Maples said. “Sometimes I think I'm a crazy mother who is trying to hold on to the memory of my son. But other times, I look at the ways that these teens are lighting so many candles in the darkness that will help to light the way for a better and safer community for all of our children. I know that something positive is coming out of this tragedy.”

More information on the Joe 15 Team is online at www.thejoe15team.org or available from Page-Maples at 703-895-1606.