

Braithwaite well-respected

By Diana Elliott
Of the Emerald

Shortly after 8 a.m. on Nov. 12, Chris Braithwaite laced up his running shoes and headed out for a morning workout on Pre's Trail.

A few hundred yards away at Skipworth Juvenile Detention Center where Braithwaite worked as a counselor to delinquent children, 15 children were methodically finishing with breakfast and attending to morning chores.

For the children at Skipworth, morning tasks are a daily requirement. It's all part of a plan to emphasize teamwork as a method to help these emotionally disturbed youths adjust to society.

"It's so ironic... Chris tried to provide guidance to kids who were violent."

— Paul Lenarduzzi

But this, morning the two-time Olympic competitor wouldn't return to praise the residents on a job well done.

While Braithwaite was on his routine workout, 19-year old Michael Feher, allegedly clad in army fatigues and equipped with a .223-caliber rifle was climbing to the rim of Autzen Stadium. In a shooting spree Feher opened fire on the unaware runner and killed him with a shot that penetrated his side and lodged a bullet into his chest.

Aside from seeing that the students at Skipworth did their duties and cooperated with one another, the 39-year-old Braithwaite specialized in counseling the troubled youths.

Skipworth is a public detention center, which houses children under the age of 18 who have had trouble at home or problems with the law. The average stay ranges from 12 to 14 days, but most stay for less than five days.

"What he did wasn't too different from what a parent must do in a family setting," says Paul Lenarduzzi, director of Lane County Juvenile Department. "He did the mechanical task of supervising activities, but he also did a lot more," Lenarduzzi says.

"Chris brought in the human element. If a child was distraught about a parent missing a visit or upset about bad news in a letter, Chris would counsel them, talk to them, and calm them down."

Braithwaite wasn't one to leave things unfinished, remembers Lenarduzzi.

"He always followed through to the conclusion. He was one of those employees who would arrive early and stay late if he needed to finish something," Lenarduzzi says.

It was that dedication that often haunted Braithwaite.

"He would appear extremely hurt when children returned to detention. It's that thought that you could have done something more," Lenarduzzi says.

But Braithwaite couldn't be criticized for not giving his all to the kids at Skipworth. Last August while many Americans were awed by athletes such as Mary Lou Retton and Carl Lewis, Braithwaite was busy organizing a mini Olympic competition for his students.

"He did it all on his own time," Lenarduzzi recalls. "He went to businesses to ask for dona-

tions of prizes for the kids. He got ribbons and made sure that every student would be acknowledged."

"He blended his talents for running with his work at the detention center," Lenarduzzi says.

The talented sprinter set a national record of 9.2 seconds for the 100-yard-dash in 1973 while attending East New Mexico State University. It was his talent for running that brought Braithwaite to Eugene in 1975. The native of Trinidad ran for the University during the 1975-76 track seasons under head coach Bill Dellinger.

In 1976 and again in 1980, Braithwaite participated in the Olympic Games, competing for Trinidad and Tobago. At Moscow in 1980 he was a semi-finalist in the 100-meter at the age of 35.

His persistence to continue training and competing in international meets into his late 30's that awed many in the track community.

"He was very dedicated to training," Dellinger says. "He was 25 years-old when he came to Oregon. He was more mature than his teammates and very likeable."

Aside from his individual training, Braithwaite was also very involved with the Oregon International Athletic Team, an international track club comprised of about 30 postgraduate track and field athletes. OIAT was founded in 1983 by several athletes who decided to break away from the Oregon Track Club.

Braithwaite had recently been elected president of the club that has organized such activities as the Eugene Indoor Meet and the Womens' 10K Run. It is also instrumental in sponsoring the Butte to Butte and The Race.

"He was very serious about running, but he wasn't grim," says Paul Banta, administrator for the OIAT. "Athletics were important to him, but he didn't make them the only dimension of his life. He balanced out his running with his work and his family. He just had a really good perspective on the role that athletics played in his life."

Braithwaite made no secret of the importance of his wife, Sharon and his five-year-old son, Shawn, in his life.

"He helped so many kids that had a background similar to the young man who shot him."

— Paul Lenarduzzi

"Chris always brought his family to the meets," Dellinger recalls. "He used to bring his boy to the all-commers' meets, and (Shawn) would run the 50-yard-dash."

Most who knew Braithwaite, knew him to have drive. And his drive not only pushed him to the finish lines, but also caused him to excel in child care, notes says Lenarduzzi.

"He made kids tow the line," Lenarduzzi says. "He made it clear to them what needed to be done, and they knew they had to do it. But he didn't do it in an authoritative fashion, the kids just respected him."

Lenarduzzi believes that Braithwaite just had a knack for dealing with children.

"He was always seeking to make them think before acting," Lenarduzzi says.

"It's just so ironic," Lenarduzzi says with a hint of disbelief. "Chris tried to provide guidance to kids who were often violent. He helped so many kids that had a background similar to the young man who shot him."

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