

Friends rally to support Verboort

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

On Friday, May 22, three McNary High School students were involved in a car crash on Lockhaven Drive N.

While two of the involved students were treated and released, the third, Austin Verboort, remained in a coma at Salem Hospital at press time. Details of the exact circumstances are still being investigated, but Verboort sustained brain trauma and fractures.

Loved ones, friends, teachers and more turned out in droves at the hospital showing their support for Verboort, with many standing vigil for hours, but friend Trevor Gilbert knows something others might not:

"If it had to happen to anybody, he's one of the strongest people I know. He's going to get through it and he's going to be fine," Gilbert said.

Friends since they were toddlers, Gilbert and Verboort have grown up together and he wishes his friend knew how much support he's getting from the community.

"He's the best guy I know and he's super-generous. He would have been at the hospital for any of us," Gilbert said.

Within hours of the accident, a GoFundMe account (www.gofundme.com/vaees) had been set up to assist the Verboort family with medical expenses. It topped \$10,000 within 48 hours and exceeded \$13,000 as of May 27.

Response at McNary has been quick and overwhelming.

By Tuesday morning, students in the Celtic graphic arts program had asked to design T-shirts in support of Verboort and they were on sale for \$20 at the school by the end of the school day. Shirts are available at the school and all proceeds are being donated to the family.

Tori Fryman and Katelyn Kolb were two of the graphic arts students printing shirts.

"It's nice having so many people want the shirts already," said Kolb.



Katelyn Kolb and Tori Fryman print #supportverboort T-shirts in the graphic design room at McNary High School. Students began producing the T-shirts Tuesday morning.

Fryman added, "We're showing (Austin) that we care even though he doesn't know it yet."

During lunch periods on Tuesday, staff and faculty members Kim Pittsley, Spencer Doyle, Kathryn Reyes, Stephanie Hanson, Tracy Rhoades and Rhonda Rhodes were organizing efforts to send cards to the Verboort family.

A prayer vigil was held at Dayspring Fellowship Wednesday, May 27.

Friend Austin Herndon said Verboort's personality made him someone everyone wanted to be around, and the outpouring is only proof of that.

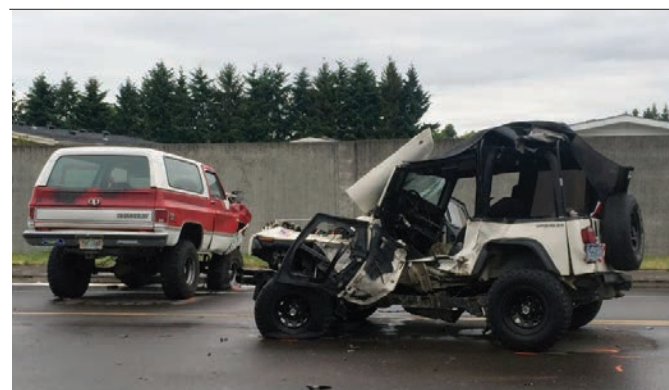
"We got his back, he's had ours and we'll have him," Herndon said.

McNary Principal Erik Jespersen addressed the entire school regarding the situation during announcements Tuesday morning.

"When people ask me

about what it's like to be the principal of McNary High School, I tell them that this school is a community. At McNary, and in Keizer, people care for one another and support each other," said Jespersen. "In times such as these, it is important to be sensitive to those who may be struggling right now. I would encourage everyone to focus on the small things today. Be kind to one another, say please and thank-you, smile a little more today."

CRASH: 'This is what his body and brain need...'



Courtesy Keizer Police Department
Austin Verboort was critically injured on May 22 when the white 1995 Jeep he was driving collided with the 1986 Chevrolet Blazer seen on the left. The other two teens involved in the crash were released from the hospital not long after, but Verboort was in a coma.

(Continued from pg. A1)
"We are encouraged by these slow improvements that he continues to make," the site said. "He is still in a coma but we are remaining patient and remembering that this is what his body and brain need to rest and heal."

Another update was posted Tuesday evening.

"Austin has continued to breathe on his own today even after being (incubated)," the update read in part. "He is still in a coma in critical condition. We are all hanging in there and are so thankful for the continued love and support each and everyone of you have shown us. It has been so incredibly helpful. We know we have a long road ahead of us so keep being patient and rallying behind our boy."

Sgt. David LeDay with the KPD on Tuesday still gave no indication of what happened.

"This case is being worked on and is currently under investigation," LeDay said. "Be-

fore any final release of information is made, we need to make sure all the facts are in place."

LeDay noted accident reconstruction cases "traditionally take at least a month or so" to complete. Anyone who witnessed the crash is asked to contact LeDay at 503-390-3713 ext. 3482.

Police Chief John Teague on Wednesday afternoon confirmed Verboort was headed west on Lockhaven when he attempted a u-turn and was t-boned by the Blazer.

Lockhaven Drive was closed for several hours after the accident as members of the Marion County Crash Team comprised of members from the KPD, Oregon State Police, Salem Police Department, Marion County Sheriff's Office and Woodburn Police Department investigated.

A prayer vigil was held for Verboort on Wednesday afternoon at Dayspring Fellowship Church in Keizer.

We'll transform your kitchen or bath into what you've always dreamed of

Remodeling by **CLASSIC HOMES INC.**

503.393.2875
remodelkeizer.com
CCB#155626



Now Accepting Reservations!

Can it *really* be different?

A **new option** in Senior Living is coming to Keizer, where every service is designed to support your independence and well being.

From the fine finishes in your apartment home, to our extraordinary Life Enrichment programming, to the innovative supportive health services, The Village at Keizer Ridge is designed with **you** in mind.

Senior Living can be **different**...let us show you how!

*Call today to learn about **special rates** for early depositors, or visit our Sales Office located at:*

1184 McGee Court NE, Ste. 203, Keizer, OR 97303



villageatkeizerridge.com • (503) 390-1300