

Braxton: Academy students feel impact of family tragedy

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that big smile and a song in his heart," said Paul Nofield, owner of the Driftwood Restaurant and Lounge in Cannon Beach.

Braxton, a manager at the Driftwood, died Nov. 9 after a three-car collision near Shelton, Washington. Kobe died Nov. 11 from injuries sustained in the crash.

Amber Hulbert, Michael's fiancée and Kobe's mother, and their daughter Kaia, a kindergarten at the academy, also were in the vehicle and sustained injuries. "The father passed immediately, and his son, my first grade student, Kobe Braxton, sustained injuries so that they had to put him into a medically induced coma," Hull said.

The event left a scar on both the academy and the community at large.

'A breath of fresh air'

Nofield met Michael Braxton in 2015 in Buckeye, Arizona, where he also has a home. Braxton was working at the Verrado Golf Club. They formed a friendship in the following years, spending time with one another's families and playing golf together. In 2018, they started discussing the idea of Braxton coming to work for the company in Oregon, and the Braxton family visited that summer.

"Michael is definitely a professional hospitality person," Nofield said. "He could read people and understand their ways just by looking."

In fall 2020, Braxton and his family made the move to the Oregon Coast, and he assumed the manager role at the Driftwood.

"Michael fit right in," Nofield said. "He took right away to the staff, and the staff took to him. ... He was one of the greatest managers I ever met in the restaurant industry. He had the heart of hospitality. He also had a heart for people."

For Patrick Nofield, president of Escape Lodging Co., which owns the Driftwood, Braxton was "a breath of fresh air." When Braxton was hired, he sent Patrick a message thanking him for the job.

"That's the kind of guy



Photos by Katherine Lacaze

ABOVE: Drawing by a Cannon Beach Academy student, one of many remembering Kobe Braxton. LEFT: Students provide a memorial for their classmate.

'OUR COMMUNITY IS GETTING BACK AND WE'RE GETTING THROUGH THIS, BUT WE'VE LOST SOME AMAZING YOUNG MEN HERE. IT IS A LOSS.'

Ryan Hull, the interim director of Cannon Beach Academy

he was," Patrick Nofield said. "He always portrayed that he was positive and outgoing and fun."

Paul Nofield recalls Braxton's extensive assortment of colorful and crazy shoes that reflected his personality.

"He had a Nike collection that was wild," he said, adding even when Braxton was wearing professional shoes for work, he often had on wacky socks underneath.

The Braxton family was traveling to Union, Washington, for Escape Lodging's managers retreat at the Alderbrook Resort & Spa when the accident occurred.

Upon hearing of the incident, the mood and the focus of the retreat changed, said Patrick Nofield.

"We gathered all our managers up in a room and talked about the grief and loss and prayed and just tried to be there for each other."

Instead of celebrating the company's success and going through their strategic

planning process, Patrick Nofield added, it became a time to explore, "How do we honor our core values by being family right now?"

"This kind of stuff happens every day throughout the world, but when it hits you, it's like, 'How tragic, what a loss,'" he said. "It gives you more empathy."

A tribute to Kobe

At Cannon Beach Academy, "It's been a roller coaster," Hull said. "All those things that make life so busy and hectic just seemed to stop. You just are shocked and numb and can't realize what has just happened and what has been taken away."

When he first heard the news about the accident on the afternoon of Nov. 10, his response was disbelief.

"You're like, 'Well, no, they got their information wrong. That can't be what happened,'" he said.

The academy was holding its first Parent Teacher Organization meeting that evening, and throughout

it, they continued to get updates about the family, including that Kobe was in a medically induced coma at the hospital.

"That was very tough," Hull said. "Everybody was very caring and thoughtful, and we had good discussions there with the parents."

The school also sent out a message on Veterans Day, so families had a chance to talk about what happened with their students on a day when they didn't have school. It wasn't until Nov. 12 that news reached the school about the tragedy.

"We talked to the kids," Hull said. "We were very honest, very transparent on what happened and what's going on, and then we listened, too."

The students in Kobe's class immediately came up with the idea of writing notes to place around his desk. They are filled with drawings and messages such as, "We miss you, Kobe" and "I love you, Kobe."

"Our kids, our family,

our community, our teachers, they are very strong in supporting each other," Hull said.

The Seaside School District also had counselor Kaile Jones visit the academy on Nov. 15 to provide support to the students. When it became clear there was need for extra time to counsel students, she returned on Nov. 16.

"Every kid that came to her asked to come," Hull said, adding some students were able to go back a second time "after they had a chance to think about it."

Since the crash, Trisha Sweet, Hulbert's sister, started a GoFundMe campaign to support the family. While the original fundraising goal was set at \$20,000, the amount raised had surpassed \$77,000 as of Monday, with more than 570 donors.

"We are very thankful for everyone that is helping and supporting our family through this rough time," Sweet wrote on the

GoFundMe page, later adding, "Thank you everyone for all the donations and prayers. We love each and every one of you."

On Nov. 11, there was a post on Driftwood's Facebook page stating, the Driftwood family "is mourning the shocking loss of our beloved manager, Michael Braxton, who passed away earlier this week in a tragic auto accident."

"Please join us in showing Michael's family incredible support as they move through this tragedy," the post continued. "Your generosity and prayers are deeply appreciated."

Community members and contributors have expressed an outpouring of love and support for the family and shared memories of Braxton and Kobe.

"Our community is getting back and we're getting through this, but we've lost some amazing young men here," Hull said. "It is a loss."

Johnson raises \$2 million for independent bid for governor

By GARY WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

State Sen. Betsy Johnson's independent campaign for governor flexed its fundraising muscle, filing a state report that it has \$2.3 million on hand for the race.

Johnson, a longtime Democratic lawmaker, announced in October that she would forego the political party primaries and run as a nonaffiliated candidate. She will have to submit nearly 25,000 signatures to go directly onto the November 2022 ballot.

The move would set up a rare three-way race between the winner of the Democratic and Republican primaries in May.

Johnson's campaign finance report included a number of large contributions from business interests.

Her campaign underlined the support from both top political parties. Contributors include Mike Bonetto, the then-Republican who served as chief of staff to former Gov. John Kitzhaber, a Democrat.

Republicans include Antoinette Hatfield, the wife of Mark Hatfield, the former U.S. senator and governor, along with former Eugene Mayor Jim Torrey and former Portland area state Rep. Jeff Helfrich.

"I'm grateful to everyone from across party lines and across Oregon for helping our independent campaign get off to a strong start," Johnson said in a statement. "I only wish I had more time to return calls — we'd have even more in the account!"

Johnson represents Senate District 16, which

includes the North Coast.

Some of Johnson's big donors locally, according to the filing, include Paula Teevin, who is married to Shawn Teevin of Teevin Bros. Paula Teevin contributed \$100,000. Hampton

Lumber, which has a mill in Warrenton, gave \$100,000. Pacific Seafood, which has a plant in Warrenton, contributed \$50,000. Van Dusen Beverages Inc. gave \$25,000. Englund Marine & Industrial Supply contributed \$25,000 and owner Jon Englund gave \$25,000.

Earlier this fall, the secretary of state's website showed Johnson with \$521,605 in available cash, the bulk coming from money she rolled over from her state Senate campaign finance committee.

The governor's race is

already attracting significant money for candidates.

Former New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof, who lives in Yamhill County, has raised \$1.2 million since announcing last month that he would run as a Democrat.

State House Speaker Tina Kotek, a Portland Democrat, announced a run just before Labor Day. As of Monday, she had raised \$440,442.

Treasurer Tobias Read is running as a Democrat. His campaign reports raising \$661,018.

Among Republicans, Bud Pierce, a Salem doctor who lost a GOP campaign for governor in 2016, is the top fundraiser. He has taken in \$752,939 — with a significant percentage coming from his own funds.

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.



Betsy Johnson

Playground: Could debut by this summer

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Mayor Paulina Cockrum picked up on the idea, proposing Centennial Park near Trail's End Art Association as the location, funded by a mix of donations and city dollars.

Sturgell's Quarter Mile Challenge aimed to collect

enough quarters to stretch the length of one-quarter mile — by Berkley's estimate, \$4,290. She exceeded that, raising almost \$12,300.

City residents donated an additional \$33,600, and the city has more than \$100,000 available between parks equipment and parks maintenance and repair funds.

"Nothing is set in stone at this point, but we wanted to give you the best estimates of the direction you're heading," Sweet said.

The project now heads to the Planning Commission, which will need to grant a conditional use permit to the

playground. "Planning and the public must support the placement of this playground in Centennial Park in order to move forward," Sweet said.

With approval, construction takes about 14 weeks, Sweet said, and the playground could debut this summer.

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