

Manassas Journal Messenger

A MEDIA GENERAL NEWSPAPER

MONDAY, AUGUST 25, 2008

InsideNoVA.com



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Michael Page, 18, left, T.J. Maples, 8, and Ashleigh Maples, 18, man a snow cone maker and popcorn machine at The Fairmont, a retirement community, on Saturday as part of the Joe 15 team, a non-profit group that does volunteer work in memory of Joe Page who was killed in February.

Volunteer group forms after loss

By AMANDA STEWART
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Mike Domenech says he's always a clown, but on Saturday, he looked the part.

Domenech, 19, donned a multi-colored wig, strapped on over-sized red shoes and covered his face in face paint Saturday to play the role of the clown during a carnival for residents at the Fairmont, a retirement community in the Manassas area.

Like the other volunteers at the carnival, he also wore something else: a T-shirt bearing the picture of his friend, Joe Page.

Domenech and the other volunteers who staffed the carnival games, passed out snow cones and popcorn, and entertained the Fairmont residents Saturday are members of the Joe 15 team, a new non-profit group recently founded in honor of the 20-year-old Page, who was shot at a party in the Manassas Park area in February.

Joseph Christopher Page — Joe to family and friends — went to a party in the 7500 block of Allegheny Court near Manassas Park on Feb. 3, police said.

Though he didn't know it, there

was some trouble at the party.

Three allegedly uninvited guests showed up at the house and were asked to leave after a fight broke out.

Police believe that the three then returned to the house and one of them shot randomly into the house, striking Page.

The three, Shannon Smerbeck, Jose Escobar and John Moran, have been charged with murder and have trials scheduled for October and November.

Page, who did not know the shooters and did not know there had been a fight at the party earlier, was flown to Inova Fairfax Hospital after being shot. He died there a few days later on Feb. 7.

His mother, Debbie Page-Maples, said that it is in that hospital that the Joe 15 Team began to take shape.

During the days that Page was in the hospital, his friends filled the waiting rooms, showing their support and wanting to help, she said.

"When we would come out of the ICU, the hallways were just lined with people. There would be like 25, 30 people that were spending the night," Page-Maples said. "It amazed me."

While he was in the hospital,

Page's friends made a poster with the words "Pray for Joe" which they all signed and which now sits over the fireplace in Page-Maples' house.

They also began donating blood in his name at the hospital, giving a total of more than 40 units of blood.

"It was really just their energy, their compassion just really got to me. I just kept thinking about it," Page-Maples said. "I thought wouldn't it be so nice to direct this energy to channel this energy that they have? And that's when I thought about organizing something to help the community."

And the Joe 15 team was born.

Fifteen was Page's favorite number and he used it for everything, his mother said. He used to say that age 15 was the best year of his life, she said.

Though formed only a few months ago, the group, made up mostly of teens and young adults, is already active in the community, hosting blood drives, playing games with residents at the Fairmont and holding food drives for the Securing Emergency Resources Through Volunteer Efforts shelter.

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The group has adopted a high-viz in front of the Northern Virginia Community College Manassas campus, where Page was a student, and has recently set up a scholarship fund in Page's name.

They also coached a basketball team at the Boys and Girls Club this summer.

Many of the Joe 15 Team's activities take place at the Fairmont.

"It's like a home away from home for us now," Page-Maples said.

The group hosts monthly Wii nights and balloon volleyball games at the retirement home in addition to volunteering at other special events such as a father-daughter dance and the carnival.

"I think it's very nice of them to come here," Fairmont resident



James Hendrix/News & Messenger

Mike Domenech, right, part of the Joe 15 team entertains residents of The Fairmont, a retirement community, on Saturday in Manassas Park.

Mary Lowe said, before trying her hand at a bean bag toss game during Saturday's carnival. "They're

very cheerful young men and women and it's wonderful for us," Fairmont co-manager Chris

Stegall said the Joe 15 Team's energy and efforts are welcome at the retirement home.

"It's wonderful for our residents and they've done a lot here," Stegall said. "It's just a heartwarming story."

Page-Maples said the Joe 15 Team wants to spread their story and, by extension, Page's story, in the community.

"I want the story to be told. I want people to know that things like this are happening in our neighborhoods, happening to our friends and our family and just bring some awareness," she said.

Domenech, Page's best friend, said he likes to tell Joe's story through the Joe 15 team.

"It's cool that we're getting Joe's name out there and that we get to tell the story," said Domenech, who has a tattoo with Page's name on his arm. "That's what I like about it: getting to tell the story and changing lives."

Domenech and Page-Maples both said they hope more area young people will get involved in volunteering, either through the Joe 15 Team or through other groups.

Page-Maples recently submitted a proposal to the county schools to start Joe 15 clubs at each of the county's ten high schools and hopes the team's efforts will spread throughout the area.

"I think it's going to continue to grow as people find out who we are and what we are doing," she said.

In addition to providing community service in the area, the Joe-15 team also offers a way for Page's family and friends to make something positive come out of tragedy.

"You never really get over it," Page-Maples said. "But this helps."

For more information, visit www.thejoe15team.org.

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