



Tribute to son to light up Forks Twp. center

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By JENNA PORTNOY
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Randy L. Hartranft loved the outdoors.

So when the 26-year-old Palmer Township resident was killed in a car crash, his family's decision to plant a tree in his parents' Hackettview Avenue back yard was a fitting tribute.

High winds toppled the 25-foot-tall blue spruce Wednesday – the day before the 15th anniversary of Randy's death.

Losing the living memorial to their son saddened parents Jean and Richard Hartranft, but they found a way to make sure their son's spirit still brightens the holiday season.

They donated the spruce, trimmed to about 20 feet, to the Forks Township Community Center.

"It's a tragedy that this tree was not going to be on our property anymore. But at the same time the ending will be really nice that the tree will be up again," Jean Hartranft said Thursday.

The township Kiwanis Club is hosting the annual tree lighting ceremony 7 p.m. Sunday at the center off Mitman Road. The tree is the biggest the township has ever erected, said Ed Kleppinger, head of the parks department crew that transported it to the center.

In addition to a guest speaker and visit from Santa Claus, Jean and Richard Hartranft's 9-year-old granddaughter, Devon, plans to sing with her Forks Elementary School classmates during the ceremony.

Kelly Sullivan, the mother of Devon and Sarah, 14, said her mother and father decorated the tree every Christmas.

"It was something that was very devastating to the family, but instead of having it be tossed away in the garbage, now it's being used for a good cause," Sullivan said.

"Maybe there's a reason for everything."

Sullivan, who works for an architectural firm in Clinton, has fond childhood memories of shooting BB guns with Randy on their uncle's Plainfield Township property.

Sullivan's brother, Rick Hartranft, had the idea to plant the tree directly outside his parents' kitchen window after the Dec. 2, 1989, collision on Route 248.

"I guess it was just something living to keep his memory around. It was in the back yard, and my parents could look out and see it," said Rick Hartranft, who is equipment manager at Easton Area High School. He was recently hired to work as equipment manager at the Forks Township Community Center as well. He has two children, Travis, 10, and Brooke, 12.

Rick Hartranft also remembered his brother's passion for hunting, fishing and skiing. Randy once found a hurt owl, nursed it back to health and made sure it was returned to the wild.

About two years before his death, Randy climbed 40 to 50 feet up a tree to rescue the family pet, a cockatiel named Snowy.

Asked why he risked his life to save the bird, Randy was quoted in a 1987 newspaper article saying, "I couldn't just let him go. God, he's like part of the family."

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