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FEATURED

## Austin High's 'gentle giant' dies

By Deangelo McDaniel Staff Writer Jan 19, 2017



Green

The first time Yvette Evans met Will Green, she said it was like meeting a gentle giant.

"I'm not talking in terms of his stature," said Evans, Decatur City Schools' human resource director. "I'm talking about his heart."

Green, who had been an assistant principal at Austin High School since 2011 and was battling cancer, died Tuesday after receiving a treatment at UAB Hospital in Birmingham. He was 44. A family member said he collapsed and died from a blood clot.

"He was winning his battle with cancer and told me he would be back in the spring," Austin High Principal Melissa Scott said. "He was in good spirits when I talked with him last week. My heart is hurting."

Green, who came to work for the Decatur school system as a special education teacher in 1999, had been on medical leave since Sept. 19.

His funeral will be Friday at 1 p.m. at Rockwest Baptist Church in Goshen, near Troy. The body will be at the church one hour before the funeral. Visitation will be today from noon until 5:30 p.m. at Grubbs Funeral Home in Troy.

"We lost a warrior and a true leader," Decatur Superintendent Dan Brigman said. "This is very sad and a shocking situation."

He said the district has extra counselors at the school for staff and students.

"Schools throughout the district have stepped up, and I commend them," Brigman said.

The mood at Austin High on Wednesday was somber as teachers and administrators tried to carry on as normally as possible. Behind closed doors, however, they cried, hugged and shared memories of the man they said had the biggest heart in the school district.

"We're in shock," an emotional Ressa Chittam said in the hallway near Green's office.

Before moving to the EXCEL Center, she worked with Green as an assistant principal at Austin.

Chittam said she doesn't have a memory of Green that doesn't involve laughter.

"Whatever story he told, it always ended with laughter," she said.

"He had a big heart, and this is a big void for the entire school system."

Green, a college baseball player who had degrees from Troy State University, Alabama A&M and Lincoln Memorial University in Tennessee, shied away from drawing attention to himself, but often fielded questions about being drafted by the New York Yankees.

An injury cut short his opportunity to play professional baseball, but Green used the experience to remind students — especially student-athletes — about the importance of getting an education.

"I always tell these guys they are one play away from sports being over and I use myself as the example," Green said in an interview with The Decatur Daily last year.

Evans said Green never stopped pursuing education and was working on his doctorate in educational leadership at Lincoln Memorial.

"He knew the importance of education and what it could do," she said. "He loved working with children, was easy-going, jovial, had an infectious laugh, but was the consummate professional."

Larry Collier, director of federal programs for Decatur City Schools, said he heard about Green's love for children, but didn't know the man until the two were roommates during an educational retreat in 2013.

"He loved children and he loved to golf," Collier said. "He tried his best to get me out there on the golf course and he was good at it. We've lost a warm, gentle person who never met a stranger."

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