

RCHS Responds To Sunday Tragedy
Principal Andy Bryan Outlines Events At The School
By Patte Wood
Staff Reporter

If there were a hero to be singled out among all the heroes at Jordan's Point this past weekend, it would have to be RCHS Principal Andy Bryan. While all the first responders and other search and rescue people were doing their job, Bryan was also doing his in the same calm, understated way that he deals with the everyday business of running Rockbridge County High School.

At a time when a tragic incident impacts the students at RCHS, it is the faculty, staff, and administration that are prepared to come to the fore and help the school community deal with it.

This past weekend when 16-year old sophomore Charles Volpe tragically died while swimming at Jordan's Point, Bryan was the force that kept the needs of the students in focus and made sure that all involved, including the school community, the greater community, rescue workers and the media were informed of what was being done along with Lt. Steve Crowder who also did an amazing job communicating the details and progress of the tragedy that impacted all of Rockbridge.

On Tuesday, April 25th, Bryan provided the local media with a summary of the event and how the school responded. His is really the most complete on-site witness account available.

Bryan relates, "on Sunday evening, as word spread that there had been a swimming accident at Jordan's Point, numerous students, parents, and community members assembled at the Pavilion. As word spread, many support personnel responded to phone calls from parents and school officials. Dan Shybunko, Nancy Johnston, Jane Horton, Jan Kaufman, Twila Brown, Patti Higgins, Mike Cash, Jake Burks, Teri Basz, Tamara Cummings, and too many to name responded to the scene to help RCHS students. Lt. Steve Crowder was very kind and updated students during the course of the evening regarding the ongoing operations on the river. Steve and other rescue personnel were great during the entire two-day period, updating and supporting students at the Pavilion.

"On Sunday night, teachers were notified of the incident. They were given instructions on how to help students on Monday morning. On Monday, counselors from Rockbridge County High School, members of the Community Services Board, counselors associated with the American Red Cross, and support personnel from the Rockbridge County Schools were present in the school to support students. School officials coordinated these efforts with support from Jim Quist, American Red Cross, and Keith Lisenbee of Rockbridge Community Services. Support for help also came from Washington and Lee University, Lexington City Schools, and Buena Vista Schools.

"During the course of the day, students were allowed to check out with parents' permission if they wanted to go to Jordan's Point. Counselors also were on site to be with the students. Local businesses provided food and water for students and parents who had come to be with their sons and daughters.

"At the school, administrators and guidance counselors followed Charles' schedule throughout the day to answer questions and to provide support for the students. As the afternoon wore on, it became apparent that more counselor support would be transitioned from the high school to Jordan's Point. School administrators, guidance counselors, counselors from the American Red Cross and counselors from Rockbridge Community Services were available at the Pavilion to support students and were there when word came that Charles Volpe's body had been found.

Bryan reports that on Tuesday, counselors are on standby for the students. He explains that the students are very sad about what has happened to Charles who was a very valued member of the school community. "Our thoughts go out to his family and friends," said Bryan. "The outpouring of support from the community has been overwhelming and all of the above mentioned individuals and agencies have done a tremendous job supporting our young people."

Bryan also praises the students for having done an outstanding job as well. "They are very strong and have been very supportive of each other."

RCHS guidance counselor Deborah Jarrett says of Charles: "He had a ready smile and a great sense of humor. He was a bright addition to his classes and aspired to study marine biology. After the ninth grade, he spent the summer in the Virgin Islands researching sea turtles. He loved the water; was a certified skin diver and like to sail. He also loved reading Hemingway. Friends and adults would say that Charles was definitely his own person, not one to be swayed to do something just because everyone else was doing it. Charles was on the tennis team and loved playing music in the jazz band."

Teen Music Night Raises Money for Charles Volpe Scholarship

Fine Arts in Rockbridge hosted a teen music night, "Tunes at the Troubadour" Saturday, May 6 at the Troubadour Theatre on Henry St. Teen representatives to the FAIR board, Grace Johnston and Aaron Richardson, decided to dedicate the evening to Charles Volpe and to raise money for the Charles Volpe Memorial Scholarship Fund. In addition, University Florist offered a matching donation for each ticket sold.

Grace Johnston, declared "the event went better than my wildest dreams. I always wanted to fill the Troubadour, and we did it! It was wonderful to see everyone come together to enjoy music and celebrate the life of an amazing person." The musicians loved playing to a full house. High school musicians included Jake Adams, Chelsea Bryant, Ben Goldsmith, Annie McElroy, Ciro Nascimento, Aaron Richardson, William Rush, Ben Staton and Weston Taylor. John Sheridan, a 2005 graduate of RCHS, joined the other musicians.

According to Aaron Richardson, "It is just amazing how the community has come together to support the Volpe family in this time of loss." Students donations brought in \$318 towards the scholarship fund, University Florist will contribute \$144 and the RCHS Wildcat club donated the proceeds from the sale of drinks for a total of \$498 to go towards the Charles Volpe Memorial Scholarship Fund.

This was the third teen music night sponsored by FAIR. The teens plan to continue these teen music nights next year. For more information contact Marsha Jones, Executive Director of FAIR, 464-3247.

Volpe Memorial Celebrates A Unique And Energetic Life

By Patte Wood
Staff Reporter

More than 500 people gathered at Jordan's Point on Sunday morning, April 30 for a memorial service celebrating the life of the energetic, friendly, smiling and always ready with a joke to make you laugh, RCHS sophomore, 16-year old Charles Oliver Volpe. There were friends and family of all ages that had known Charles there to remember how he had touched their lives. Speakers included his uncles Tim Volpe, Randy Riggs, Sebby Volpe, his father Chuck, Marge McMullen, Jay Landman, Captain Monk from Sea Trek Camp and his best friend, Ben Goldsmith who performed the song "Better Together." Reyan Helsel also performed "Forever and Today." All spoke about good times with Charles and read from emails and letters he had written to them, including his own description of himself from www.myspace.com on the internet.

As people arrived at the celebration, the music of Bob Marley could be heard and during the memorial, The RCHS Jazz band, of which Charles was a member, was there to perform the music he loved to play. There were photographs of Charles displayed that illustrated the child and then the boy on his way to becoming a young man. Next to the guest book table, a large memorial white sheet was placed with colored pens so

people could write a personal message.

After the formal part of the memorial, people were invited to stay and talk with each other. Some gathered in groups to talk about Charles and the tragedy of a vibrant life cut short. Others meditated by the water.

Flower petals were available for people to take to the rivers edge and throw upon the water. At the water's edge, impromptu memorial had grown as friends and family placed mementos and messages near the spot where he drowned. Many gathered at the spot to quietly watch the flower petals float downstream, sending Charles on his way.

The family asked that photographs not be taken during the service to protect their privacy. With the permission of the organizer of the memorial, Marge McMullen, the following photos were taken before and following the actual memorial celebration and capture the special place Charles held in the hearts of those that knew him.

The family has set up a scholarship fund - the Charles Volpe Memorial Fund, in his memory. To make contributions, contact the Bank of Botetourt, 65 East Midland Trail, Lexington VA 24450, Attn. Ellen Cooper.