

By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

The lives of two Grant families who had dreams and expectations for their teens were shattered by a fatal accident early Saturday morning on West 4th Street.

Several communities in southwest Nebraska are grieving the loss of 16-year-old Michael Dreiling and 17-year-old Katelyn Rowley who were killed in a rollover accident after midnight Friday night.

According to the Nebraska State Patrol, both victims were ejected when Dreiling lost control of his vehicle about one-quarter mile west of Grant, where it went into the south ditch and rolled. Both victims were pronounced dead at the scene.



The Perkins County Sheriff's Office, Perkins County Ambulance, and Nebraska State Patrol responded to the accident shortly before 4 a.m. after the wreck was reported by a motorist who came along.

According to Perkins County Sheriff Jim Brueggeman, speed was a factor in the accident which occurred on a gravel road. However, alcohol was not a factor in the accident, said Brueggeman.

Both were juniors at Perkins County High School where they were well known and admired by fellow students and involved in many extracurricular activities, including play production, musicals, FFA, speech and basketball.

Michael played football, Katie played volleyball. He was a member of mock trial and was practicing for spring golf. She was training for track season. Both were honor students. He was preparing for competition at State Speech meet this week. They were both looking forward to prom this weekend.

Outside of school, each of the students were actively involved with their communities. Katie was a library volunteer, involved with AWANA (Appointed Workmen Are Not Ashamed), enjoyed Bible quizzing and went on mission trips. Michael coached youth soccer, was a member of swim team, had participated in 4-H, and was currently working toward his Eagle Scout status in Boy Scouts.



"Both of these students were role models for their character, academics, and excellence in extra-curricular activities," said Activities Director Chip Kay who was also Michael's Plainsmen varsity football coach. "Anyone who came in contact with them couldn't help but smile because of Katie's warm personality or Michael's witty quips. Both of them made in impact on all of us. I personally marveled at their ability as leaders and their strong character."

Mr. Chris Mestl, boys varsity golf coach, said, Michael always had a good time on the golf course even if the golf wasn't going his way. He made me laugh several times when I had the opportunity to play with him." Volleyball coach Penny Hite and track coach Shayne Hite each had much to say about the two athletes and their ability to brighten a room, which appears as commentary on Page Four.

As the tragic news spread throughout the Grant community and each small surrounding community on Saturday morning, a school crisis team made up of administration, teachers, counselors and office staff gathered at the high school where students, staff and community members could gather and support one another.

“Our school family is heartbroken over the loss of Michael and Katie,” said Superintendent Tobin Buchanan. “They were outstanding young people who represent the very best of what we hope for in Perkins County. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families at this time. They will be deeply missed by all.”

On Saturday evening a prayer vigil with nearly 300 in attendance was held for Katie and Michael at the Grant United Methodist Church.

The annual Grant Volunteer Fire Department cancelled their annual awards banquet for this year in honor and support of longtime member and Senior Fire Captain Rick Dreiling who lost his son.

Not only the Grant community has been affected by the tragedy—both families have ties and family members in the surrounding communities of Ogallala, Imperial, Wauneta and Champion.

On Monday, the Perkins County Schools Crisis Team as well as an external crisis team made up of personnel from area districts and ESU 16 were available at all three school buildings.

Michael’s funeral service was Tuesday morning at the Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church. Katie’s was that afternoon at the Evangelical Free Church.

The SPVA music contest to be hosted by the high school on Tuesday was postponed until next week. Rather, following the afternoon funeral service on Tuesday, the high school was again opened for student, staff, and community to gather and support one another.

“I have witnessed great strength and resolve within our school staff and student body during this difficult time,” said Buchanan. “Through the many tears I have also witnessed laughter and smiles in remembrance of Michael and Katie. The joy they brought to all who knew them will be what we remember most in our time of grief.”

Katie is the daughter of Pam and Tim Rowley of Grant. She has a younger brother, Sam. Michael is the son of Rick and Dawnya Dreiling of Grant. He has a younger sister, Laura. Complete obituaries appear on Page Two.

