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Grief Turns Into Action The Lindsey M. Bonistall Foundation is On The Move

By: Jean Bello

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The Bonistall family is on a mission: to ensure no family will ever have to endure what they have been through. Lindsey Marie Bonistall, daughter of White Plains residents Kathleen Cooney Bonistall and Mark Bonistall, was murdered May 1, 2005 at her off-campus apartment while a sophomore at the University of Delaware. A 2003 graduate of Good Counsel Academy in White Plains, the recipient of the 2001 Volunteer Service Award presented by Mayor Joseph Delfino, an All American and All Star Cheerleader, listed in the Who's Who Among American High School Students, and captain of the Lakenridge swimming and diving teams, Lindsey was just 20 years old when her life was violently taken. James Cooke Jr. has been arrested and charged with her rape and murder. Jury selection for his trial is set for Jan. 23, 2007.



Lindsey Bonistall

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Bonistall Family

Though the grief this family has experienced is immeasurable, they have channeled it into a personal cause to secure safe off-campus housing for all students. Named after Lindsey's familiar tag line, "Peace out," PEACE OUTside Campus, The Lindsey M. Bonistall Foundation is a certified off-campus housing program which the Bonistalls hope to bring to all schools across the nation. Already they have chapters starting up at the University of Delaware, University of Kentucky, Cornell University and University of Pennsylvania. Working together with local law enforcement agencies, the municipality, the university, the students and the landlords or landlord associations, PEACE OUTside Campus sets standards for safety, conducts inspections of residences and certifies those in compliance. Certified residences are then listed on both the Foundation and college's Web site. Mark Bonistall, chairman of the Foundation, says the benefit to landlords is free marketing and listing of their property, but more importantly, parents and students have an "avenue of selection."

Residences considered for certification must comply with municipal and state codes as well as a list of criteria set forth by PEACE OUTside Campus, regarding locks on doors, windows and skylights; landscaping (no stones or objects in immediate area that can be used as door stops and nothing taller than four feet in a 15-foot perimeter of the structure); and exterior and interior lighting, to name a few. Periodic inspections will continue to ensure landlords maintain compliance.

Response to this voluntary program has been varied, with some areas, such as the Newark, Del. Police Department being very open-minded, whereas others less so, says Mark. He continues, "The most powerful lesson is the students' awareness." Referring to a survey of over 100 university students, Mark says, most did not feel safe whether on or off campus. They didn't know and had never asked the question as to whether the locks had been changed, and "Where every one of them had a safety issue, they weren't doing anything about it." The Foundation also plans to hold safety awareness seminars on area high school campuses including Good Counsel Academy, Harrison and Rye high schools.

Kathleen, treasurer of the Foundation, vows, "Our whole idea is to save a life, because we don't want anyone to go through what we did," but it takes money to implement the program. Expenses include solicitation of chapter students, education and awareness, inspections, construction of the Web site, and even the hiring of public safety officers where needed. The Web site www.peaceoutsidcampus.org, which is in the development stage, will be site specific and will include contact information for tenants whose rights have been violated, victim assistance and counseling services.

Last October, the Foundation, which has recently been granted tax-exempt status, raised over \$20,000 at the first annual 5K run/walk held at Court Sports, Westchester One Club in Elmsford, with over 800 participating. On Sunday, Oct. 22, again at Court Sports they hope to do at least that. Registration in the event is \$25 (for walk-ins) and includes buffet breakfast, entertainment, a T-shirt (while supplies last) and an option to purchase raffle tickets for valuable prizes. Some area establishments donating their services include Abatino's, Tony LaStazione, Trader Joe's, Kraft Foods, Pepsi, and Trotters, among others. A golf outing planned for the spring will also help with the fund-raising efforts, and corporate sponsors are encouraged and welcomed.

Other members of the PEACE OUTside Campus board include Lindsey's sister Kristen Bonistall, secretary; her cousin McKenna Lowry and grandmother Sheila "Mema" Cooney. Glenn Staub, a White Plains resident and personal fitness trainer, is helping to coordinate the Oct. 22 event. Registration begins at 8:15 a.m. with a starting time of 9:15 a.m.

Kathleen is determined not to let people forget Lindsey. She says, "The new freshmen at Good Counsel don't know her. We don't want her forgotten so the foundation gets lost. Her energy, her life was so positive, we have to keep that going." For more information, visit rememberlindsey.com.



Lindsey Bonistall

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Bonistall Family

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