

UPDATED: Beloved Leonard teacher, councilwoman dies in Tuesday collision

Written by By Betsy Blevins, Editor and Publisher

Wednesday, 09 November 2011 16:24 - Last Updated Thursday, 10 November 2011 11:41



Nov. 10, 2011 - Flags at Leonard City Hall flew at half-staff and the regular monthly meeting of the Leonard City Council was canceled this past Tuesday night as the news that Leonard Elementary teacher and Leonard City Councilwoman Tammy Barnes was tragically killed in a head-on collision earlier in the day. Many found it hard to find the right words to say, and the faces in the school halls carried looks of sorrow and tear stains from her fellow staff members, students and student's parents deeply grieving for their friend.

Barnes will be remembered for many things - her beautiful smile, her huge heart, her passion for teaching kids, her angelic voice that just about everybody in Leonard had heard at one public event or another, her appreciation for all types of music, and her all-around love for people.

Each year as Leonard Elementary third graders prepared to take the standardized state exam, it was Barnes and close friend Sheri Watson who pulled out all the stops to entertain and cheer on the students during their annual pep rally. This past year, the two donned sumo suits for a skit where they took turns doing karate chops at one another, while other teachers served as back-up dancers.

"My mind just keeps turning thinking of all the shenanigans we got into together," Watson said. "The sumo skit, the library program, the outdoor classroom. I don't know who I will call to do these crazy things with, but I do know God's angels are happy because Tammy is singing with them now."

Her alto voice found harmony easily, but also blew audiences away with her broad range, backed by a good set of pipes. This combination allowed her to sing easily through the high notes of The Star Spangled Banner at a Chamber of Commerce banquet and the low notes of some bluesy tunes for a women's event at First Baptist Church. She never passed up the

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opportunity to minister through the gift she believed God blessed her with. She had recently sang an upbeat number for the funeral of Ben Treadway, who had requested she sing that particular song several years prior. Little did she know she would be joining Treadway just two weeks later in the heavenly choir.

Her love for people could be seen in every aspect of her life - especially her love for children. It was she and Watson who held the summer reading program for the kids in Leonard each year, and would bravely take them - all 40-something of them - on field trips at the end. The duo were also planning and implementing the construction of an outdoor learning classroom at the school, which is under way now thanks to grants applied for and received by Watson and Barnes. She had no reservations when it came to dressing up or acting out for a part or lesson, as long as the kids were happy and entertained and educated. Her classroom was lively and the kids enjoyed her class pet, a tarantula, and her creative ways of teaching.

"She was the best teacher," said her third grade student, Brenley Sadler. "She sang our spelling words and always made us laugh. I loved her very, very, very much, and she loved us all."

Barnes was an established third grade teacher at Leonard Elementary School, where the campus enjoyed several years of Exemplary ratings by the Texas Education Agency based on the performance of the third grade classes.

Her greatest love in life was a child - her son, Hudson, a seventh grader at Leonard Junior High. She would often talk about missing "Huddy Buddy" - as she affectionately called him - when he was away, and spent Thursday nights watching him play football for Leonard Junior High and liked taking him on "dates" to the movies. And Hudson expressed how much he loved her in return, posting simply, "Best mom ever," on her Facebook page Tuesday evening.

Barnes' love for community was evident not only through the reading program, but also through her involvement as a Leonard City Councilwoman, a position that she had held only for a short time - but plenty long enough for her fellow council members to grow fond of her. She had spent countless hours before the new fiscal year in budget workshops with the other council members, and was getting her sea legs as a voice for the citizens of Leonard.

Anna Police Department's Tracy Foster reported late Tuesday that the collision was head-on

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between Barnes in her 2010 Chevy Camaro - another of her loves - and a 2000 Chevrolet Suburban on State Highway 121 approximately two miles south of the FM 455 cut-off. Three occupants of the Suburban were transported by ground ambulance to hospitals, but Foster reported he didn't believe they had sustained life-threatening injuries. He further stated that they preliminarily believe weather played a factor, because there was a downpour of heavy rain in the area at the time of the accident, which was first reported between noon and 12:15 p.m. He stated that Barnes is believed to have died on impact. Besides her son, she is survived by her mom, dad and a sister.

Many who understand how big a role she played in the community wonder what's next. Her class at Leonard Elementary will have a familiar face from the school in her room for the next few days or weeks, until a permanent solution can be found. Counselors were on hand Wednesday for the students and teachers who needed some support. The city can appoint somebody to complete the remainder of her term, or let the seat remain open until the next election. Whatever the case, there are some big shoes to be filled with the reading program, in her third grade classroom at Leonard ISD, and on the Leonard City Council, and a big hole to fill in the hearts of the many, many people who loved her.

"I loved her with all of my heart," Watson said Tuesday night. "She was my soul sister and will be missed every minute of every day."

Funeral services for Barnes are scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 12 at 2 p.m. at the Leonard High School gymnasium. The family will receive friends Friday from 7-9 p.m. at Wise Funeral Home in Bonham.