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A school and community in mourning



John Normile/Special to The Sun

Community members gather for a student-organized candlelight vigil Wednesday evening at Howe Field in memory of **Conor Long, 20**, a 2017 Hamburg High School graduate who died Sunday in an accident at Zoar Valley.

Long remembered for being helpful, making a difference

Hamburg High graduate, 20, dies after fall at Zoar Valley

By Michael Petro
HAMBURG SUN EDITOR

Conor J. Long was anything but a typical student.

While the 2017 Hamburg High School graduate may have stood out for being well-rounded in the classroom and as an athlete who took part in a plethora of extracurricular activities, what actually made him most unique is that he was always looking for ways to help other people, according to Hamburg Central School Superintendent Michael Cornell.

"Most people will help if they're asked, but truly unique people are out there trying to find ways to help, have an impact and make a difference," he said. "He was always doing that."

Long, 20, of the Town of Boston, died Sunday when he fell more than 60 feet as he tried to climb a waterfall in Zoar Valley, a wilderness area in Cattaraugus County.

According to the Cattaraugus County Sheriff's Office, Long was with three friends when he fell into the gorge and suffered serious head injuries. Due to inclement weather, a rescue helicopter could not be deployed and first responders were unable to reach Long for approximately an hour after emergency calls were made around 3 p.m.

As of Tuesday, more than \$30,000 was raised for funeral costs and an outpouring of grief and memories have been shared at a



Conor J. Long

GoFundMe page set up by a friend.

According to the author of the page, Ryan Dils, "Conor was a true stand up guy. He was never in a bad mood and he was always kind. He always did what he could to give back to his community whether it was through volunteering or just saying hello to a stranger."

Long is a former class president at Hamburg High School, was senior school representative to the Hamburg School Board and a member of the Finance Academy. He helped start the Health and Science Academy at the school. Long also raised funds for cancer research through Bald for Bucks.

He competed for Hamburg High School in track and field, as well as swimming. He had

been coaching track and field and attending ECC as a college freshman, with plans to attend St. Bonaventure University.

Pat Cauley, the school's athletic director, said Long embodied the spirit of a Bulldog, the school's mascot, by working hard and caring for and helping the people and fellow students around him.

"He was a difference-maker," Cauley said Tuesday while on vacation. "I'm completely devastated."

"He was a very balanced kid," he added. "So positive and always willing to help in any way he could."

Legislator Lynne Dixon, who knew Long as a "dear friend" of her daughter's, said on Twitter that he will be missed.

"He was goodness. He was kindness. He embodied all that is right with the world," she wrote. "To know Conor was to know his life was impactful. That it had meaning."

Cornell first got to know Long when he became superintendent at Hamburg during the 2015-16 school year, and Long was the junior class president. Cornell said he was just one of many people who was drawn in by Long's drive, smarts and personality.

"He drew me into him like he does lots of other people," Cornell said. "You want to be around him and talk to him. He was a deep thinker and a doer, as well as a hard worker."

If he thought an initiative was important, Long would follow through and "make it happen," whether it was a class project, competition or fundraising drive, Cornell said.

"It didn't matter what it was. If it involved

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Long was 'a gift taken too soon'

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helping people or trying to make a difference, he was right there and ready to roll," Cornell said.

After he graduated, Long would email Cornell periodically about college and his future plans and aspirations. Cornell said Long wasn't positive about what profession he'd pursue and still had thoughts of multiple avenues to go down once he had a bachelor's degree. The two last talked in late May.

"He was working hard to customize a course of study for himself that would have allowed him to make a good living, while making a difference for people," Cornell said.

Long certainly made a difference during his high school days. Cauley remembers a young cross country runner struggling with his maturity, and Long stepping up to take the student-athlete under his wing.

"I think it really helped this young man to have Conor there for him," Cauley said. "He told me, 'Coach, I'll take care of it. Don't worry, I'll take care of it.'"

That sentiment was echoed by many of the people leaving messages at the GoFundMe page.

"Conor was the ultimate Bulldog and the most amazing teammate," said parent Shannon Gilmartin. "He made my daughter feel welcome on

the track (team), showed her how to use starting blocks and cheered her on and encouraged her."

Wrote Phil Steiner, "This guy was magic. A gift taken too soon. Thank you, Conor, for taking my sons under your wing. I am eternally grateful."

"You were a great man and even greater leader," David Becker wrote. "You were the best teammate anyone could ask for and will be missed greatly."

Long left an impression on his teachers, as well.

Margi Meyer wrote, "Conor was one amazing person. He was one of the brightest lights that I have taught or ever met. His life was beautiful and a gift to all who knew him."

And he did it all with a smile.

"What a wonderful young man he was ... never saw him without a smile!" wrote Toni Violanti.

He is survived by parents Brian and Mary Long; sister Megan (Kevin) Quinn; brother Brian Long; grandmother Elizabeth Eagan; nieces Madelyne and Natale Quinn; and his true love, Emma Ballowe. He was predeceased by grandparents John and Ruth Long and Richard Eagan.

Services were held Thursday at Donald M. Demmerley Funeral Home, 21 Pierce Ave., Hamburg.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be said today at 10 a.m. at SS. Peter & Paul Catholic Church, Hamburg.