

Turning Tragedy into Triumph

Most of us can't even imagine what it is like to cope with the loss of a child. Ann Marie and Osmond Simm experienced the horrible reality of losing their son, Ryan, as a result of a car accident in November 2007, and they have chosen to turn that tragedy into an opportunity to help others.

Ryan was born on November 23, 1988 in Rochester, NY. He graduated from Aquinas Institute and attended Columbus State University and Monroe Community College. Ryan began playing soccer at the age of five and loved the sport. He played on the school teams for Churchville-Chili, North Star Christian Academy and Aquinas Institute. In addition, Ryan played for various travel teams including the Greece Cobras, Rochester Junior Rhinos and Chili Pythons. According to his mom, Ryan's skills enabled him to play any position on the field including goal keeper during his middle school years at Churchville-Chili. At the time of his death, Ryan was being recruited Mars Hill College in North Carolina to play for their soccer team.

Ryan loved small children and had a natural ability to connect with them. He was a member of the Gates Presbyterian Church Youth Group and traveled to Jamaica as a member of a work team. He also volunteered his time at the Center for Youth. Last year, when Gates Presbyterian Church, where the Simms are members, decided to build a school in Jamaica for three, four, and five-year-olds who are living in poverty within the small village of Green Island, Anne Marie and Osmond decided to hold a fundraising dinner in celebration of Ryan's life. They were able to raise \$12,000 in support of the Jamaican school project.

Soccer was Ryan's first love and this year, the Simms have chosen to keep Ryan's memory alive by hosting a soccer tournament on April 25 at Unity Health System Total Sports Experience (TSE), 880 Elmgrove Road, Rochester, NY. All proceeds raised from the tournament will be donated to Children's Institute, a local not-for-profit that has been working in the Rochester area and nationally for over 50 years to strengthen the social and emotional health of children and improve their chances for success in school and in life (for more information, visit www.childrensinstitute.net). In addition, a silent auction is being planned to be held at TSE during the tournament. To participate in the tournament, teams may register online at www.totalsports-experience.com.

As Ann Marie talks to local business owners to secure donations for the silent auction, you can see the pride in her face and feel her excitement about sharing the life of her son with those she meets. She knows that her work will make a difference for many children in the Rochester area, and I think Ryan would be proud of his mom.

–Lori VanAuken
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