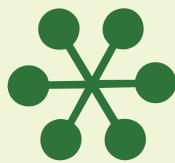




# GORDIE CENTER

FALL 2021



## Learn. Connect. Act.

Learn

Connect

Act

### What is the Gordie Center?

The Gordie Center is a national non-profit at the University of Virginia. Our mission is to end hazing and substance misuse among college and high school students. Our goal is to provide quality education to prevent hazing and alcohol overdose to students, families, and communities.

### How does the Gordie Center's work relate to you?

Hazing can happen to anyone. 47% of college students report having been hazed in high school. Hazing happens in all kinds of groups: fraternities, sororities, athletic teams, marching bands, and even religious and leadership organizations. Alcohol overdose is the most common cause of death in hazing fatalities.

### How can you help?

Read the stories included in this publication to learn more about the work of the Gordie Center and the tragic impact of hazing. Visit [gordie.org](http://gordie.org), share our posts on social media, and talk with the students in your life about hazing and the PUBS signs of alcohol overdose. Turn your concern into action — provide lifesaving education by donating to the Gordie Center today!

We are so grateful for you — you make our work possible! We hope you and your family are healthy and safe — please reach out to us and let us know how we can support you.

Sincerely,

Gordie Center staff



Leslie and Michael Lanahan with their daughter Lily and her fiancé Johnny DePeters.

### DEAR FRIENDS,

You never want to get the call we did on September 17, 2004. And you never think you will. We were in that boat — we thought we had equipped Gordie with the tools to survive his first 3 weeks of college. We were wrong.

The Gordie Center was born out of our need to warn students and families about hazing — so many people are just like we were, never believing in a million years that something like this could happen to their child or their family. But it can and it does — since 2004 when we lost Gordie, there have been 76 deaths from hazing alone. Fifty of those hazing deaths “report” alcohol involved, similar to Gordie’s. There have been 3 young lives lost since January of *this year*, and these preventable deaths remind us of why the work we began 17 years ago is still so important today.

We can’t know the exact number of lives saved by sharing Gordie’s story, but we continue to hear from parents and students that our educational efforts on hazing and alcohol overdose have saved countless lives. We are so proud of the work of the Gordie Center because we know it reduces the number of families who enter the unwanted club of losing a child to senseless hazing. Thank you for joining us in our efforts, for remembering our son, and for buoying our family with your support over the last 17 years. We miss Gordie every day, and in his memory, we will continue to work to save lives, along with all the other parents who have lost children in this tragic, but very preventable way.

Warm wishes for a happy and healthy fall.

Sincerely,

Leslie and Michael Lanahan  
Gordie Bailey’s mother and stepfather



## Adam's Legacy

*Looking out for others*

Adam Oakes grew up in Northern Virginia as “the baby of the family” — he was the only child of Linda and Eric Oakes and the youngest of three grandchildren by 20 years. “The family saw him as a blessing who became everyone’s baby. He was spoiled rotten with love and affection,” Courtney White, Adam’s first cousin, says. Growing up, Adam spent a lot of time with his grandparents and loved to travel with his parents — whether riding roller coasters for hours at amusement parks or spending time at Sunset Beach in North Carolina. Beach vacations were Adam’s favorite. They represented being surrounded by loved ones and having fun in the ocean or pool. Instead of joining his friends during Beach Week after graduating from high school in June 2020, Adam chose to stay at the beach with his family — he wanted to see his friends, but he didn’t want to risk exposing his family to COVID-19. His dad drove him all the way to his friends’ beach house in Myrtle Beach, SC, but Adam decided not to get out of the car, opting instead to go back to his family’s beach house in NC and hang out with his cousins and grandparents. He was absolutely adored by his cousin’s children, with whom he played on the beach, swam at the pool and in the ocean, and played basketball and video games. The whole family was very close-knit. “When Adam entered the room, we immediately smiled and

were happy to see him...and he was even more happy to see us,” Courtney says of Adam’s interactions with her family.

*“That’s who Adam was...sweet. The type of person who would go up and introduce himself to the new kid in class.”*

Adam was always known for his caring and kindness. Eric recalls, “When Adam was 9 years old in 4th grade, he was playing rec league football when a kid he tackled on the other team didn’t get up right away. As is customary, both teams took a knee on the field, but Adam stayed standing. From the sidelines and the stands, it looked like Adam was standing over the injured kid and maybe trash talking him. Adam’s coach got very upset with him and pulled him off the field. I came over to Adam on the sidelines and he was heartbroken — ‘Dad, I hurt my friend! He’s in my math class, so I was just standing there telling him I was sorry, and I hoped he was going to be okay. I didn’t mean to hurt him!’ The injured player was bruised but able to continue playing, and after the game, Adam made a point of going over to apologize to him again. That’s who Adam was...sweet. The type of person who would go up and introduce himself to the new kid in class.” As he grew up, Adam kept that same demeanor and sweet personality.

Adam called his tight group of friends “the boys,” and he loved playing Xbox with them. He loved *playing* games but playing *with* his friends and talking online meant the most to him, especially during the pandemic when hanging out in person wasn’t possible. His friends were everything to Adam — he was a great listener and always happy to give his honest opinion or advice about any situation. “He was a fun person to be around — upbeat and positive, charismatic, with an infectious smile,” Eric says.

*“He was searching for a group of guy friends like he had back home, so he decided to join a fraternity.”*

Sports were a huge part of Adam’s life. He played football, basketball, and baseball in various recreational leagues growing up, and volunteered as a coach when his playing days ended. He loved to talk or debate about sports, and he was the commissioner of many Fantasy Football leagues with family and friends. These experiences and overall love of sports influenced his decision to major in sports marketing at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond, VA.

Like many college freshmen in the fall of 2020, Adam’s freshman year wasn’t going as planned. The COVID-19 pandemic had pushed all of his VCU classes into an online format, but Adam felt like he would miss out on the full campus experience by living at home in Potomac Falls, VA (2.5 hours north of VCU). Linda and Eric were supportive of Adam’s desire to live at VCU, even though that meant he would be quarantined in his residence hall room, as the university was prohibiting indoor gatherings of students. Adam spent the fall and the early spring semester traveling back and forth between VCU and home — sometimes he would go home for a long weekend and stay a few extra days because he was lonely without a social outlet. Adam had a strong group of friends from high school, but he’d always

been a homebody, and very close to his parents. Because of the campus pandemic restrictions, “Adam was having a hard time meeting people because he was sequestered in his room doing online classes and studying,” says Eric. “He was searching for a group of guy friends like he had back home, so he decided to join a fraternity.”

Tragically, the decision to join the Delta Chi fraternity at VCU cost 19-year-old Adam his life. On February 26, 2021, Adam attended the Delta Chi Big/Little brother reveal night. The event was his first as a pledge, and along with a few of his friends from high school, he hoped the process would lead to Delta Chi membership. Early the next morning, Adam was found unresponsive in the Delta Chi house where the event was held. When first responders arrived, Adam was pronounced dead at the scene. The medical examiner’s report stated that Adam’s cause of death was alcohol overdose. Courtney released a statement about the medical examiner’s findings that read, in part, “We now have the scientific evidence needed to confirm his death was caused by hazing, specifically the excessive amounts of alcohol the fraternity supplied and pressured him to drink that night at the Delta Chi Big/Little event.”

In the weeks leading up to his death, Adam was at home with his parents. They knew he



Young Adam sitting at his family's kitchen table.

was participating in fraternity recruitment, and not knowing anything about the fraternities at VCU, Eric and Linda supported their son’s decision to join. Thinking their only child was safe by joining a chapter that was officially recognized by the campus, they were happy he was trying to make friends, getting out of his residence hall, and breaking out of his shell. During Adam’s zoom interview with Delta Chi, Eric overheard someone ask Adam what he would bring to Delta Chi should they offer him membership. Adam responded that he had given a lot of thought to what he could bring to the group, and that he was great with websites and social media. He felt like he could help them with their online presence. The Delta Chi members responded enthusiastically to Adam’s answer because their current website guy was graduating that spring, so Adam could fill that need for them. “Adam was really excited to feel like he found a place where he fit and had something to offer,” Eric remembers.

*“We now have the scientific evidence needed to confirm his death was caused by hazing, specifically the excessive amounts of alcohol the fraternity supplied and pressured him to drink that night at the Delta Chi Big/Little event.”*

After the interview process in mid-February, Delta Chi offered Adam a bid to join their pledge class. Adam had been at home virtually attending classes, and returned to VCU that week specifically so that he could attend the big/little reveal night event. The day before he went back to Richmond, Adam and his mom went shopping for a suit to wear at upcoming pledge events. Prior to leaving his residence hall to attend the event that Friday evening, Adam was nervous about what the Delta Chi members were planning that night. He was anxious and worried. Courtney says, “We didn’t know what fraternity he was pledging, so we had no information about them. We only knew that Adam was going to learn who his big brother



Adam with friends at VCU.

was that night. The big brother was to be his mentor — the person to look out for him, take care of him, show him the ropes, and teach him about fraternity life. That night ended up being Adam’s first and last night as a Delta Chi pledge. No one looked out for him.”

After Adam’s death, his family learned even more about his character. At Adam’s memorial service, a friend shared a story about a girl sitting on the floor in the hallway of their high school. She was crying, and students hustled around her to get to class. When Adam saw her, he stopped and sat down next to her — he didn’t know her, but Adam told his friends to go ahead to class without him so that he could sit with her until she felt better. That’s just who he was. Courtney says, “He never left without hugging you goodbye and saying, ‘I love you.’ His last text to me was just that, ‘I love you.’ That’s the type of kid he was — he wanted you to know how he felt about you, no questions asked.”

His death devastated the entire family, especially his mom and dad. Eric shares, “When Adam died, so did a huge piece of us. He was our only child and a true gift from God as we thought we couldn’t have children. He was our sunshine. His death has ruined our lives and left a huge hole in our hearts that will never be



Adam with his dad, Eric.

*"When Adam died, so did a huge piece of us. He was our sunshine."*

repaired. We miss him so much! How do you go on without the light of your life?" Adam's family quickly formed the Love Like Adam Foundation to keep his memory alive while also doing good for others. Their foundation will award 3 annual scholarships to students from Adam's high school who mirror Adam's characteristics and traits — students who may not have a 4.0 GPA, but are kind and good to other people. They also want to share Adam's story to equip graduating seniors and their families with a better understanding of the

pressure's students face during the transition from high school to higher education. The family is lobbying to change Virginia's hazing law from a misdemeanor to a felony to deter hazing as well as hold those who haze more accountable for their actions.

Adam's family connected with the Gordie Center shortly after Adam's death, after the Gordie Center reached out with condolences. "It was so beneficial to read about Gordie, his story, and his family's journey throughout this process," Courtney says. "Our hope is that the



Adam with his parents, Linda and Eric.



Adam with his cousin, Courtney.

Gordie Center will continue to get the word out about hazing, its prevention, and its impact on everyone involved. Adam was an amazing person, a kind and caring soul who always tried to include everyone in everything he did. He is more than what happened to him. We hope that sharing Adam's story will help the Gordie Center educate others on the dangers of hazing."

"Adam's death, as well as the deaths of other hazing victims, was preventable. All were special

kids with amazing lives to be led, only to be cut short by the choices other people made to haze, not get help, and to continue a tradition of destruction. If you think this won't happen to you, please think again. Nobody should fear for their life to gain entry or acceptance into a fraternity, sorority, or any other type of club. We do not want any other families to go through the pain, heartache, and misery that we go through every day since Adam's death. Adam had such a wonderful future ahead of him that was senselessly cut short. Please educate your kids on what constitutes hazing, what to do if they see it happening, and above all, teach them what to do when they think someone needs help," Eric pleads.

*"Nobody should fear for their life to gain entry or acceptance into a fraternity, sorority, or any other type of club."*

Linda's birthday came on June 27, exactly 4 months after Adam's death. Eric heard an alarm going off in their house that day and traced the sound to Adam's MacBook. Adam had set a calendar reminder for Linda's birthday, so when Eric looked at the laptop screen, he saw the calendar alert and the note Adam had written with the alarm: "Happy birthday Momma you're my favorite." The moment was a sweet and heartbreaking reminder of their precious boy and what they have lost. Eric says, "Adam didn't want to die that night. He only wanted to join the fraternity to make new friends. Adam believed in being kind to everyone and bringing out the best in people. I know he made my wife and I better just by knowing him. It's time for hazing to be eliminated for the safety and health of all. We want Adam's legacy to be about change." \*

# Education at VCU

*Providing support after tragedy*

The Gordie Center reaches out to families and schools whenever we learn of the tragedy of a hazing or alcohol overdose death to serve as a resource, offer support, and provide education, and Adam Oakes' death at Virginia Commonwealth University was no exception. Our staff was heartbroken for Adam's family and the VCU community, and immediately sent a card to Adam's family. We attended the virtual vigil organized by students at VCU, and expressed our condolences in the event chat, which caught the eye of VCU's Associate Director for Civic Engagement and Fraternity & Sorority Life, Dr. LaDarius Thompson.



Dr. LaDarius Thompson

*"Working with the Gordie Center has been one of the best decisions our office has made. The Center reached out to offer support during our community's darkest time and has been a great partner ever since."*



Holly Deering explaining standard drink sizes to VCU students.

Less than 2 weeks after Adam's passing, Dr. Thompson reached out to the Gordie Center to discuss ways to support and educate students in the VCU Greek community who were reeling from Adam's death in order to prevent another tragedy. We agreed to focus on bystanders and provide education on what hazing is, how alcohol impacts decision-making, and the importance of closely monitoring impaired peers for PUBS signs. Within a month of Adam's death, Gordie Center staff created the virtual Alcohol & Hazing Prevention Basics training and delivered it to 1,000 VCU fraternity and sorority members and their chapter advisors through 12 Zoom sessions.

"Working with the Gordie Center has been one of the best decisions our office has made. The Center reached out to offer support during our community's darkest time and has been a great partner ever since," Dr. Thompson says. "Their dedication and expertise show in their carefully-crafted educational sessions. The feedback from their sessions has been remarkable within our community and we look forward to a continued partnership with the Gordie Center." Prior to the end of the spring 2021



VCU campus, © Jeff Auth at English Wikipedia.

semester, VCU virtually brought the Gordie Center in to provide more in-depth hazing prevention education in the form of our Positive Organization Expectations presentation for their Greek organizations. VCU's Fraternity & Sorority Life office also purchased various PUBS signs of alcohol overdose products from the Gordie Center store to reinforce the messages from our presentations with students — GORDIEcheck BAC cards as well as PUBS magnets, mirror clings, and posters. More virtual presentations followed in the summer and early fall.

We will also educate all potential new members of VCU's Greek community when VCU restarts their recruitment process, which was paused in the aftermath of Adam's death. Considering the COVID-related social restrictions of the past year and a half, both first-year and returning students around the country may feel even greater pressure to endure hazing in order to find a place of belonging on campus. We are proud of our partnership with VCU, providing lifesaving education, and welcome the opportunity to work with other institutions as well. \*

## WE TEACH STUDENTS...

- Even small amounts of alcohol impair judgment. This increases the likelihood that students will engage in risky behaviors they would never do when sober.
- An intoxicated person cannot make informed decisions about potential risk.
- Alcohol use can increase existing anxiety about the unknown aspects of hazing.
- Current group members may drink to mask their feelings of guilt or shame for engaging in or allowing hazing activities.
- Left unchecked, hazing behaviors will escalate.



# Shelley Goldsmith, Shooting Star

*The need for safety-first harm reduction*

On August 31, 2013, 20-year-old University of Virginia (UVA) student Shelley Goldsmith collapsed at a club in Washington DC after a night of dancing at an electronic dance music (EDM) concert. Just before she lost consciousness, she urged her boyfriend to call 911. Shelley had traveled to DC with sisters of many different sororities and members of a UVA fraternity that chartered a bus for the 2-hour drive from Charlottesville, VA. During the bus ride, MDMA (also known as Molly or ecstasy) was handed out, and Shelley took the drug. She then danced for several hours at the overcrowded club, with no easily-accessible water to prevent dehydration. Shelley became overheated, suffered from hyperthermia (heat stroke), and went into cardiac arrest, causing her collapse. Her parents, Dede and Rob, arrived at the hospital to find Shelley comatose, and she never regained consciousness. Shelley's cause of death was cardiac arrest with MDMA intoxication — she had no other drugs or alcohol in her system when she died.

Shelley had wanted to attend UVA since she was in 4th grade, and she worked hard to achieve that goal — she received a prestigious Jefferson Scholarship, providing 4 years of tuition and an enrichment stipend based on her exceptional record inside and outside the classroom, for her efforts. Growing up, Shelley would say she either wanted to be Secretary of State or a

wedding planner, which perfectly captured her personality — she was a serious student with a whimsical, playful side...and she believed everything was better with cupcakes! "Shelley was (almost) always reasonable. For as long as I can remember, she believed that morality is as simple as black and white — if everyone did what was right, justice would follow. She was highly principled from the get-go," Dede remembers. Shelley was happy and self-motivated, and also very frugal — she seldom shopped impulsively. During her sorority recruitment process, she rented dresses from a national company to wear at the various Alpha Phi events she was required to attend, and she started a trend — the company eventually hired her to wear their dresses on campus for publicity. Spending time with her friends and family was most important to her. Shelley was an earnest and faithful friend. "Shelley was competitive, but mostly with herself," Dede says. "She had high expectations for what she would do with her life. Keeping her type A tendencies in check and finding a balance was always a challenge for her." Shelley was like many other students who come to college to experience the full measure of college life. Unfortunately, she made certain decisions based on misinformation about a drug and she died, leaving behind her parents, older half-brother Nico, and her cherished nephews, as well as countless friends.

Left: Shelley Goldsmith

"There is so much that is wrong with her death," Dede says. "Shelley never should have taken MDMA, but I also know it's not atypical college behavior by some students. I just don't understand the culture that normalizes this. I know that Shelley would have made different choices had she had accurate, fact-based information. She and her friends thought they knew what they were doing but it was premised on misinformation. She had no idea that she may have an underlying medical condition that made taking this drug potentially lethal for her." Dede has become a "safety first" harm-reduction advocate since losing her daughter, pushing for legislation that would make the experience safer for students who choose to use recreational drugs. "I struggled to find a way to make sense of Shelley's death. My work to amend the federal RAVE Act and pass statewide legislation to make sure colleges deal with the substance use problem has given me purpose and has helped transform my despair into something positive. The changes to the RAVE Act ensure event organizers can implement safety measures to reduce the risk of medical emergencies, including those associated with drug use, without fear of prosecution by federal authorities. Helping to save others from making the same mistake as Shelley is a mission well worth the sacrifice of having to go through the trauma of retelling her story. Making venues safer and passing

a state law in Virginia that forces colleges and universities to work together on the substance use issue is powerful. The Amend the RAVE Act campaign and the petition it launched not only showed how concerned so many people were, it provided the clout needed to garner the attention of elected representatives and Department of Justice officials. Plus, each one of the 21,500+ (mostly young) people who signed the petition were educated about the dangers of using recreational drugs in unsafe ways. The extensive media coverage that the campaign generated also helped raise awareness across the entire EDM industry and beyond." Dede extends her advocacy work by serving as a citizen member of the Virginia Commission on Youth (VCOY), and she represents the VCOY on the Virginia Higher Education Substance Use Advisory Executive Committee.

*"She was not supposed to die. Her death could have been prevented. She could have chosen not to use MDMA...but she did, like so many other young people."*

"Rob and I have outlawed the words 'would of, should of, could of' when we talk about Shelley," Dede says. "There are things we wish we had done differently, but so many more



Shelley with her parents, Rob and Dede.

reasons to celebrate all that we did together as a family while she was alive. That is a blessing. She was not supposed to die. Her death could have been prevented. She could have chosen not to use MDMA...but she did, like so many other young people. We owe it to the significant segment of the student population that chooses to experiment with recreational drugs to make sure they do so without the risk of medical emergency or death using whatever method(s) works best. Just as we do for alcohol use among underage students."

The Gordie Center provided support to Shelley's friends and other UVA students in creating "A Night of Shooting Stars" to educate their peers about Shelley's death and about recreational drug use. You can find a video of the 2016 event on the Gordie Center's YouTube channel. Shelley's too-brief life was described as a shooting star — and a sculpture of a star created in Shelley's memory is displayed near the Gordie Center's offices in UVA's Student Health and Wellness building. Shelley's mom hopes that Shelley's story can be used to help young people protect themselves and their friends by encouraging them to get accurate, fact-based information about any recreational drug before using it — underlying health conditions, drug interactions, and excessive doses all need to be considered. "The casual use of a party drug like MDMA can kill you," Dede states. "Had Shelley known that taking Molly in an overheated, crowded night club with too little water while dancing ecstatically would lead to heatstroke and cardiac arrest, she might have thought twice about using it. Just Say Know." Dede also wants students to respect their intuition and gut feelings. "There is raw irony in one of the last text messages Shelley sent to a friend a few days before the concert: 'This whole sitch (situation) is sketchy. Haha.' If it can happen to Shelley, it can happen to you. I also think about everyone involved in Shelley's last day a lot. I can only imagine how many people are living with painful angst over the loss of their friend and what they might have done to prevent it."



Shelley with friends at a UVA football game.



Dede and Rob advocating to amend the RAVE Act with VA's Governor Northam.

Shelley's legacy is in the influence she had and the inspiration she provided everyone who knew her. Dede and Rob also created a scholarship through the Jefferson Scholars Foundation in Shelley's memory, benefitting a UVA student from Shelley's hometown region of Southwest Virginia. Shelley's legacy is also reflected in the work her mother has done to help reform drug laws that are collaterally harming young people, and to make sure colleges better educate their students about risks of uninformed substance use to prevent further deaths. "My experience is not one I'd wish on anyone. Although I live each day with gratitude, the joy I once knew when Shelley was a part of my life is now gone. I miss the way I felt before I learned how sorrowful life can be as a survivor. Shelley was delightful and had a certain sparkle — she was a very special person. I mourn that our journey together was so short, but I'm grateful for the 20 years I was able to know her love as my child." \*

# Save a Life. Make the Call.

The Gordie Center formed after Gordie Bailey's death from hazing-related alcohol overdose with the hope that sharing his story would prevent another family from enduring a senseless loss. Over the last 17 years, Gordie's story has saved countless lives with the simple message:

**Save a Life. Make the Call.**

Every young person's hazing and alcohol overdose death leaves a lasting impact on the world, rippling endlessly across families and communities, just like Gordie's. The Gordie Center partners with families who have experienced a similar loss, and we honor several of them here. The death of these young people left their families broken, their communities in grief, and their friends forever scarred. We share their stories with you to illustrate that our work is not done. Even one student hazing and alcohol overdose death is one too many. The Gordie Center's outreach is critical to ending hazing, recognizing the signs of alcohol overdose, and preventing future tragedies.



## MAXWELL GRUVER

01/27/1999 – 09/14/2017

Louisiana State University,  
Phi Delta Theta hazing

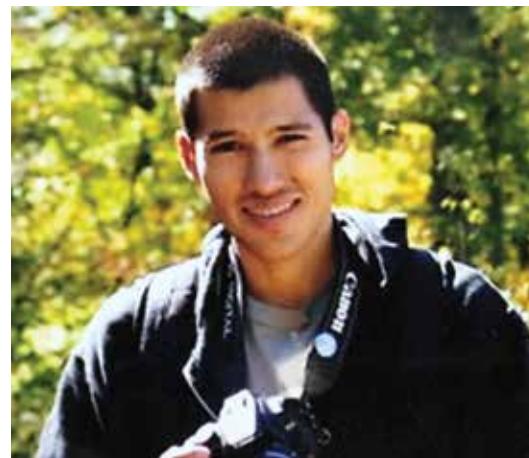
Max Gruver was an 18-year-old freshman at Louisiana State University (LSU) when he died on September 14, 2017, after being hazed during the pledge process for Phi Delta

Theta fraternity. Max grew up in Roswell, GA as the oldest child of Rae Ann and Steve Gruver, and he was idolized by brother Alex and sister Lily. Max graduated from Blessed Trinity Catholic High School, where he had a passion for sports, and even coached his little sister's basketball team. He was a generous, gentle giant with a contagious smile. Max was a published sports writer, and planned to major in political journalism at LSU.

Max's family dropped him at LSU on August 15, 2017, and as Rae Ann remembers, "Max was so happy — this was going to be his time! He was ready to take on the next chapter of his life." Less than a month later, Max was summoned to the Phi Delta Theta house for a pledge event. His phone was taken from him, he was doused in hot sauce and mustard, and he and the other pledges were forced to do wall sits while Phi Delta Theta members ran or stood on their legs. "Bible Study" followed, where all the pledges were required to recite the Greek alphabet. As punishment for wrong answers, the pledges were forced to drink from

bottles of 190 proof grain alcohol. Max was forced to take 18-20 "pulls" from the bottle in less than 90 minutes. Max was extremely intoxicated and left on a couch to "sleep it off." Despite obvious signs of distress, no one called for help, even though those around him knew Max was in trouble. Sometime during the night, Max choked to death on his own vomit. His BAC was .495 at the time of his death — more than six times the legal limit.

Max's family formed the Max Gruver Foundation after his death, which strives to create awareness, education, policy, and laws to prevent hazing. Rae Ann says, "Our family now lives with the hole in our hearts of missing our oldest son, a big brother, a grandson, a cousin, a nephew, a friend, a boyfriend. Our lives will never be the same." ✯



## HARRISON KOWIAK

01/05/1989 – 11/18/2008

Lenoir-Rhyne University, Theta Chi hazing

Harrison Kowiak was a 19-year-old sophomore at Lenoir-Rhyne University when he died on November 18, 2008 from a head injury caused by the hazing he endured from Theta Chi fraternity members. Harrison grew up in New Jersey, California, and Florida, and was the beloved oldest child of Lianne and Brian Kowiak, as well as the idolized big brother of Emma.

Harrison attended Lenoir-Rhyne on an academic and golf scholarship, and was encouraged to join Theta Chi by seniors on the golf team who were also Theta Chi members. Harrison wasn't concerned about the pledging process because his golf teammates told him that they would look out for him. One night, Harrison was taken to a field 20 miles from campus and told to walk across the field in the darkness to retrieve the "sacred rock." Members of Theta Chi (some of whom were football players for the University) formed a gauntlet in the dark and repeatedly tackled Harrison and another pledge by surprise. Harrison suffered a head injury during a tackle, and instead of calling for help, the fraternity members eventually drove Harrison to a hospital near the campus. Harrison was airlifted to a trauma center, and died the next day from a severe brain hemorrhage.

Lianne says, "When I speak with students, I remind them to call 911 if it's an emergency. Their swift action could save a life. Instead, the brothers panicked and precious minutes were wasted...minutes that potentially could have made a difference. Harrison would be 32 years old today...perhaps married with children, working in a golf-related business, traveling, and enjoying life. All of this was ripped away from him at the age of 19 to senseless hazing. There is no place for hazing -- no one should be subjected to emotional and/or physical harm to join an organization."

Lianne serves on the board of HazingPrevention.Org (HPO), and created the Harrison Kowiak Scholarship in her son's memory. The scholarship has allowed over 30 participants to attend the annual HPO Hazing Prevention Institute. "We can't bring Harrison back, yet we can move forward and try to prevent hazing deaths. I encourage parents and their children to have two-way conversations regularly. Tough love conversations may not be easy, but they can make an impact. It takes a village and we ALL must work together to prevent hazing." ✯



## SAMUEL MARTINEZ

10/03/2000 – 11/12/2019

*Washington State University,  
Alpha Tau Omega hazing*

Sam Martinez was a 19-year-old freshman studying business entrepreneurship at Washington State University when he was hazed to death during a “Big-Little” event at Alpha Tau Omega (ATO) fraternity on Nov. 12, 2019. Sam was adored by his parents, Jolayne Houtz and Hector Martinez; his sister, Ariana; and his wide circle of family and friends.

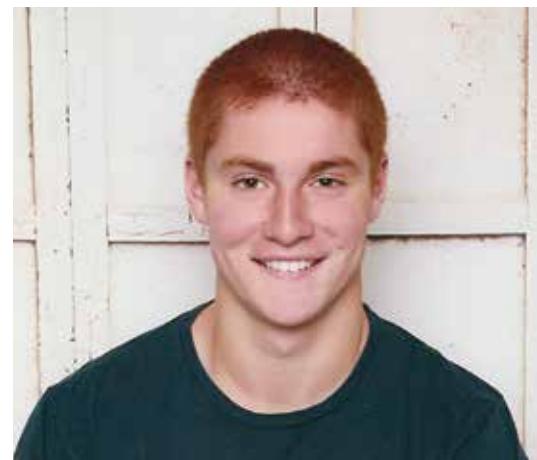
Sam graduated from Newport High School in Bellevue, WA, where he was a standout soccer player and played trombone in the school band. He was bilingual in Spanish and English and spent summers volunteering with his family in a Mexican village, working on community development projects.

Sam and his fellow pledges were subjected to a pervasive pattern of hazing that fall. On the night Sam died, the pledges were in the library studying when they were told to go to ATO. They were taken down to the basement where they were told who their “big brother” would be. Sam was handed a half-gallon bottle of rum by his big brother and told to drink the “family drink.” Fraternity members saw Sam struggling over the next several hours, but no one called for help. They put him on a couch in the chapter house to “sleep it off,” alongside other

pledges who had passed out. Sam died of alcohol overdose with a blood-alcohol level nearly five times the legal limit.

“There is no part of our lives that is not shattered by Sam’s death,” Jolayne says. “Both the national ATO organization and Washington State University knew this was a deeply troubled chapter, but our family had no way to know that. We paid the ultimate price for their lack of transparency.”

Sam’s family is currently working with state lawmakers on hazing prevention legislation. They also plan to launch a foundation dedicated to increasing transparency about the disciplinary history of Greek organizations to ensure parents and new pledges have the information they need to make informed decisions. \*



## TIMOTHY PIAZZA

02/25/1997 – 02/04/2017

*Pennsylvania State University,  
Beta Theta Pi hazing*

Tim Piazza was a 19-year-old sophomore at Penn State University when he died on February 4, 2017, after being severely hazed during a bid night event for Beta Theta Pi fraternity. Tim grew up in Readington Township, NJ, as the beloved youngest child of Evelyn and Jim Piazza, and brother to Mike.

Tim graduated from Hunterdon Central

Regional High School, where he played football and did spring track. He participated in the school’s Teen Prevention Education Program, educating 8th and 9th graders on peer pressure, bullying, and other issues facing students. At Penn State, Tim was majoring in engineering, and his goal was to help create prosthetics for children after graduation.

Tim was hazed on the first night of pledging, and forced to consume a large amount of alcohol in a short time. Heavily intoxicated, Tim fell down the stairs in the fraternity house. Fraternity members carried him back up and placed him on a couch. Tim attempted to get up multiple times throughout the night, and fell each time. No one called for help for more than 12 hours after Tim’s initial fall, too late to prevent Tim from succumbing to his injuries.

“Hazing is so insidious — you don’t even realize until you’re in it (and maybe not even then), and then you don’t feel like you can walk

away because you’re under duress,” Evelyn says. “The fact that it happened to Tim...it could really happen to anyone. The hazing was by people who supposedly liked him — they liked Tim enough to invite him to join their organization, but they didn’t care enough about him to save his life. That really hurts, because he was such an incredible person, and it was so cruel to not call for help when he obviously needed it...and to put him in that position in the first place. If they had never done this and Tim was able to pledge and be part of that organization, they would have loved him — he would have been such an asset to them and to the world. Instead, so many people’s lives were affected by losing him. It hurts just as much 4.5 years later as it did in the beginning.”

Tim’s family runs a foundation in his memory that provides scholarships to student-athletes at his high school, as well as prosthetics for children who could not otherwise afford them. \*



## GORDIE BAILEY

02/22/1986 – 09/17/2004

*University of Colorado,  
Chi Psi hazing*

## GORDIE’S ONGOING LEGACY

Gordie’s mother and stepfather, Leslie and Michael Lanahan, built the foundation for the Gordie Center after his death in 2004, and we think of Gordie and his family every day as we educate students about hazing and alcohol overdose. **In the last 9 months, at least 3 college students have died from hazing.** Our mission to end hazing and substance misuse among high school and college students remains **critical**. Every year, each new group of students needs to be empowered to take a strong stand against hazing, and know when to call 911. **We don’t want cost or access to be the reason any student lacks lifesaving education.** Together, let’s give students the tools to speak up when a situation doesn’t feel right, and to call for help when someone is in distress. Your donation honors Gordie’s legacy and saves lives.



# Empowering Students

*Ending hazing through compassionate leadership*

When Flavia Tomasello and John Tsialas' son, Antonio Tsialas, did not show up to meet his mother the Friday morning of Cornell University's Family Weekend in October of 2019, they knew something was not right. Flavia remembers, "Antonio was always on time — for him, being on time meant getting there 20 minutes early. So when I arrived (a few minutes after our planned meeting time because I'm not as timely as my son!) and he was not there...I didn't know what, but I knew something was wrong." Antonio never showed up that morning, and Flavia and John endured a frantic two days that ended in tragedy: the body of their oldest child discovered at the base of a gorge near campus, with multiple injuries and alcohol overdose. While the specific details of what happened to Antonio are unknown, Antonio had attended a "dirty rush" event at Phi Kappa Psi fraternity that involved hazing and forced alcohol consumption that Thursday night, which led to his death.

"Hazing was never on my radar for Antonio — he was always loved and accepted; he was always a leader," Flavia says. Antonio's death was stunning for his family — he had gone to dinner with his mother the night he died. He was not a big partier nor had he mentioned trying to join a fraternity at Cornell. His parents did not even realize hazing was an actual issue, thinking instead it was something

overdramatized in Hollywood movies. Antonio received an invitation to the Phi Kappa Psi event from a member of the fraternity who was also on his soccer team. His family believes he likely decided to attend because the personal invite made him feel special since none of his friends had been invited. The desire to belong is a powerful feeling that increases tolerance of and vulnerability to hazing.

*"Hazing was never on my radar for Antonio — he was never bullied; he was always a leader."*

In addition to his parents, Antonio left behind his younger siblings, Athena and Christopher, as well as a whole community of family and friends. "We miss Antonio every day. We try to stay positive, and to see what happened to Antonio as his journey in this world — he was a light to all of us in his life, and now he is shedding light on hazing so that it doesn't happen to anyone else," Flavia says. Antonio's family formed The Antonio Tsialas Leadership Foundation, a non-profit focusing on hazing prevention through compassionate leadership, to honor a young man whose life, leadership, and compassion touched many during his short 18 years. "Antonio was really known on his soccer teams as a leader — everyone knew

Left: Antonio Tsialas



Family photo of Christopher, Flavia, Antonio, John, and Athena.

that he would take new teammates under his wing, and as the goalie, he saw it as his responsibility to protect everyone,” Flavia explains. “Antonio would tell his father how much he trusted his soccer teammates. He would always tell his teammates, ‘I got your back.’ He carried this trust with him to college. John always says ‘Antonio always had everyone’s back; it’s too bad no one had his back that night.’”

The Foundation aims to inform students of the risks associated with on-campus social life, and empower them with positive and constructive alternatives so the senseless reasons leading to Antonio’s death will not happen to anyone else. Hazing is preventable, and the Foundation wants to combat it from a leadership perspective — good leaders *take care* of their groups, which eliminates hazing by example. “We want students to have all the information they need to make choices that are safe and compassionate, and really empower them to become

compassionate leaders in whatever spaces they are living in. A lot of us feel that we don’t have power, for a variety of reasons, so we give it away instead of embracing it. The victims of hazing give their power away because they feel like they don’t have a choice,” says Flavia. “Whoever you are, you can always be compassionate — you can always choose humanity and caring about others. We want to inspire young adults to embrace their power, and balance new adventures and experiences with safe and compassionate choices. Starting a conversation with high school students about the dangers of hazing practices can help prepare them to make good decisions during high pressure situations. Empowering our students to actively care for one another, rather than be passive bystanders, creates a more compassionate culture where hazing and cruelty cannot thrive.”

The Gordie Center is partnering with The Antonio Tsialas Leadership Foundation to

educate students and families about hazing. Gordie’s step-father, Michael Lanahan, has long considered hazing to be a leadership issue, so partnering with Antonio’s Foundation feels like a natural fit. Michael says, “Leadership is important in most areas of life. While it is an intangible concept, we know when it is absent,” as is the case in hazing situations.

Michael continues, “Compassionate leadership is critical when dealing with the lives of our youth, especially when they enter college. We need to educate our young people with appropriate tools to navigate college life. We



can do better. It is up to all of us.” The Gordie Center is excited to partner with The Antonio Tsialas Leadership Foundation as they grow their Ambassador program for high school juniors and seniors. We are developing interactive training presentations on hazing prevention, alcohol misuse, and bystander intervention to help these

students learn to prevent hazing through compassionate leadership. We believe that we are all stronger when we work together to prevent hazing, and look forward to honoring Gordie and Antonio through our partnership. ♦

## GETTING SOCIAL

The Gordie Center makes sure that meeting students where they are is at the center of all of our efforts...and students are on social media! This year, we ramped up our social media presence through Instagram campaigns created by a UVA graduate student and our student social media intern.

On Gordie’s birthday in February, we hosted a “Remembering Gordie” campaign that featured 4 educational “carousels” about hazing. In April, we hosted “National Alcohol Overdose Awareness Week” with carousels on the PUBS signs of alcohol overdose, when to call poison control, medical amnesty, and the relationship between alcohol and tolerance. We marked International Overdose Awareness Day in August with 5 carousels about the signs of overdose for different drugs — cannabis, hallucinogens, opioids, MDMA, and stimulants.

These campaigns, along with our short educational videos, are free tools for students, parents, and educators to share. Be sure to follow us on social media and YouTube to see our latest campaigns!



Images from Gordie Center Instagram campaigns.



# Making Every Moment Count

*Life after losing a friend*

It's been almost 10 years, but Kathryn Purves still remembers where she was when she learned that her friend, Robert Tipton, Jr., had died from fraternity hazing. Kathryn and Robert were both students at High Point University in North Carolina, and she was walking into the library that late March morning in 2012. "I was with two of my friends, and we passed someone giving a campus tour to a family as we entered the library. I got a text message from my big sister in my sorority that read, 'omg omg omg Robert died.' I froze. I didn't understand. Once it sunk in, I just collapsed. There was shock and a lot of crying over those next few days and weeks," Kathryn remembers. Robert was in the process of joining Delta Sigma Phi at High Point at the time of his death, and he was found at an off-campus apartment rented by one of the fraternity members with blunt force injuries on his head, neck, and knees, including hemorrhages on his left eye. He had been severely hazed, not just on the night that killed him, but in the weeks leading up to his death.

Kathryn and Robert met through a mutual friend during her sophomore year at High Point, and Kathryn's first impression of him was that he was extremely kind and funny. The first time they met, they were studying and hanging out at that friend's place when a wasp flew into the room. "At first, we all hid in the bathroom,

but then Robert said we couldn't hide there forever, so he went out and tried to force the wasp out of the room by throwing things at it...magazines and shoes, trying to force the wasp out an open window. It was complete chaos until the wasp finally left and we were all laughing on the floor for the next 30 minutes," Kathryn says. That same night, even though they had just met, Robert invited Kathryn along to a concert with his friends. "I couldn't go, but he was just the type of person who wanted to be everyone's friend, and wanted everyone to have a good time." Their friendship grew as Robert spent more and more time in the Greek Village campus housing where Kathryn lived in her sorority house. "I had a Papasan chair in my room, and Robert would take the cushion off it and sleep on it most nights because he loved hanging out at our place. We named it 'Rob's Dog Bed' and he loved it!"

*"He was the type of friend who would do anything for you, and he always made you laugh."*

Kathryn is now a successful businesswoman in Charlotte, NC, whose life continues to be impacted by the loss of her friend. "After Robert's death, college became a roller coaster

Left: Kathryn Purves



Kathryn and Robert enjoying dinner at a restaurant on the water in Grand Cayman Island.

*"It could literally happen to anyone. Robert was the last person I thought would be hazed. Everyone needs to be wary of situations and say something if it doesn't seem right."*

for me...I didn't know who to trust, and I fell into a deep depression. I tried to remember that he wouldn't want that for me. I honestly can't believe it's been almost 10 years... When you want someone back in your life and you know you can't have them back, it's really difficult. I think about the fun times I had with Robert, and it still cuts me to the core that we can't have those times again. Even now, it takes a lot to get out of the funk at times. He was the type of friend who would do anything for you, and he always made you laugh. Robert was, truly, one of the most amazing people I ever met, and to

know that I will never find another friend like him is hard to grasp."

Kathryn believes that Robert left a legacy of love, and that certainly applies to his beloved mother and sister, Deborah and Mary. "He loved his mother and Mary so much. After Robert's death, I became extremely close with his mother and sister and basically gained a second family, for which I am beyond thankful. I am happy to be there for them whenever I can because they mean the world to me." In 2019, Deborah established the Robert Eugene Tipton, Jr. Hazing Prevention Fund at the

Gordie Center in memory of her only son. "The work that the Gordie Center does is amazing, and it has really helped Robert's mother a lot to have an organization be so caring and not just a name," Kathryn says.

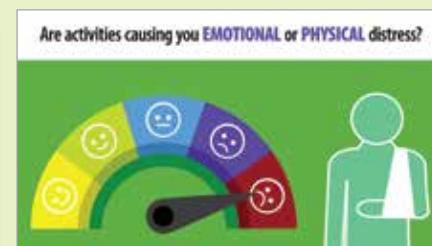
Kathryn has thought a lot about what happened to Robert, and she thinks his story is important to share with today's students "because it could literally happen to anyone. Robert is the last person I thought would be hazed. I was with him the last full night of his life, and had no idea what was coming next. Everyone needs to be wary of situations and say something if it doesn't seem right. The secrecy of fraternities needs to change...they find ways to hide hazing — and they do it solely for the purpose of power, not loyalty to anyone. You can earn respect in ways that don't involve hazing." At one point during the pledge process, Robert sent a text to a friend that read, "You don't think they can kill us?"

and in the month before his death, he called High Point's emergency center 22 times, seeking help for what he was being forced to endure. Kathryn appreciates the work of the Gordie Center in helping students recognize signs of hazing and how to help a friend they suspect is being hazed, because, as she says, "I wish I had known how to better see warning signs of someone being hazed and scared. I and all of his friends have said that about his death. Robert wasn't himself — looking back we can all see that, but at the time, I wish we knew how to better recognize it."

Kathryn thinks of Robert often, and appreciates her memories of her friend. "I try to remember every good time I had with him, and try to incorporate his positive spirit into my own life. I try to make every moment count, and make sure everyone enjoys their time when I'm with them...just as Robert always did for me." \*

## ROBERT EUGENE TIPTON, JR. HAZING PREVENTION FUND

Deborah Dunklin Tipton established the **Robert Eugene Tipton, Jr. Hazing Prevention Fund** at the Gordie Center in memory of her only son with the goal of strengthening the Gordie Center's hazing prevention efforts. As Kathryn mentioned in her profile above, students need education on the signs of a friend being hazed, and guidance on how to help. Thanks to donors, the Gordie Center created a series of educational videos to address that need. Visit [gordie.org](http://gordie.org) to view these videos and other tools that empower students to end hazing. Robert's Fund enables the Gordie Center to focus our hazing prevention efforts on meeting students where they are with lifesaving education. [Donate today!](#)



**ROBERT TIPTON, JR.**  
02/10/1990 – 03/26/2012,  
High Point University,  
Delta Sigma Phi hazing

Bystander Intervention for Hazing video still (left) and Hazing Signs: What to Do if You're Being Hazed video still (right).

# YOU MAKE IT HAPPEN!

The Gordie Center would not exist without our donors. To showcase the incredible loyalty of our supporters, we have listed this year's donors by their total number of giving years since 2010. Whether you are new to our list or have given for 10+ years, we value you. Thank you!

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Ted Grawny, a Deerfield Academy and UVA grad, has been a loyal supporter of the Gordie Center (along with his parents, Page and Jeff) since 2017.

*"I support the work of the Gordie Center because I can see the overwhelmingly positive impact it has by educating members of the community both at UVA and elsewhere. By making people more informed and increasing accountability, we will be able to prevent future tragedies like Gordie's and honor his name. I have felt a commitment to the Gordie Center since I heard his story at Deerfield Academy and look forward to supporting this cause for years to come."*

—Ted Grawny

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## APPLE Athletics

The Gordie Center is also home to APPLE Athletics. To learn about our athletics-specific resources and our NCAA partnership to prevent substance misuse and hazing among student-athletes and athletic departments, visit [appleathletics.org](http://appleathletics.org).

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You care about the students in your life. Your gift to the Gordie Center ensures they have access to quality, lifesaving education.



### Innovation

You recognize the need to evolve. Your support helps the Gordie Center create tools to meet students where they are.



### You Empower Students

You know that hazing and alcohol overdose deaths are entirely preventable. You empower students to step up, speak out, and call for help when you give to the Gordie Center.



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You remember. Your gift honors Gordie Bailey and the families of all students lost to hazing and alcohol overdose, and allows the Gordie Center to share their stories.



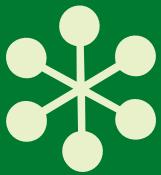
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**The Gordie Center relies on donors like you to continue our lifesaving work. Thank you!**

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Gordie Bailey with his mom, Leslie Lanahan.