

A Charismatic Buddy

Ronelle Grier

Special to the Jewish News

Veteran camper Michael Greene of Bloomfield Hills was taking a pre-camp swimming test June 20 along with the other counselors at Camp Tamakwa in Algonquin Falls, Ontario, when tragedy struck.

A strong swimmer, 18-year-old Michael was finishing his last lap when he disappeared beneath the water and did not re-emerge on his own. He was treated by emergency medical technicians and taken by helicopter to a Toronto hospital where numerous attempts were made to stabilize his condition.

Michael's parents, Elaine and David Greene, and several other family members traveled to Toronto immediately. They were at his bedside when he died the next day, June 21, 2007. Although Michael never regained consciousness, "I know that he knew we were there," said Elaine. The cause of his death is still undetermined.

Michael was looking forward to his 10th season at Camp Tamakwa. It would have been his first summer as a senior counselor, after working his way through the ranks of camper, counselor in training (CIT) and junior counselor. His older sisters, Heather and Ali, had also been longtime Tamakwa camp-

ers. "He was so good with the younger kids," said Heather.

Michael had just graduated this spring from West Bloomfield High School. He enjoyed playing on the golf team and taking photography classes. He would have been a freshman at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo this fall. He hoped to work with his father someday in the field of commercial real estate.

"He was my best friend and golfing buddy," said David Greene. "We went to a real estate convention in Las Vegas recently, and it was amazing to watch him network. We were looking forward to the next phase of our lives together."

Michael was very athletic and enjoyed a variety of sports, including golf, swimming and in-line hockey. He helped to organize a new in-line hockey team, the Chiefs, at the Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit. He started playing baseball and in-line hockey when he was 6 years old and the family lived in Florida.

"I'd sneak him out of school, and we'd go watch the Florida Panthers practice," said his mother. "If he was going to miss classes, I thought at least he should learn the right way to play hockey. It was our bonding time."



Michael Greene

Friend To All

"Michael had this charismatic presence that lit up the classroom," said Rabbi Tamara Kolton of the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills, where Michael celebrated his bar mitzvah. "He was joyful; he loved life. Other kids gravitated toward him."

"Michael had an amazing group of friends," said Elaine. "They were always at our house, 'just chillin', as Michael called it. Once you were Michael's 'bud,' you were his 'bud' forever. He reached so many people."

Since his death, Michael's friends and acquaintances have posted hundreds of messages on Facebook, a social networking Internet site.

"He loved everyone, and they loved him. Especially the girls. He was such a good friend," said Heather.

"When all the other kids would put someone down, Michael was the one who would be his friend," said David. "He was a really good listener," said Elaine. "He'd stay up all night talking his friends through problems. He was very mature, very wise."

Michael's mother attributes much of his compassionate and caring nature to growing up with two older sisters. "We were very close," said Heather. "It was

always the three of us."

"He really understood the girls," said Elaine. "I always said that whoever married Michael would have the best husband ever."

Michael had a wonderful sense of humor, even as a child, according to his parents. "He was always the one who made me laugh, even when I wanted to scream," said Elaine.

"We have to acknowledge the tragedy of his death," said Rabbi Kolton, "but we also need to recognize that his life was about joy, about loving his family and friends."

"Michael would want the people who loved him to continue to celebrate their lives, to remember the light of how he lived, not the tragedy of how he died."

Michael Greene was the loving son of David and Elaine Greene of Bloomfield Hills; brother of Heather Greene and Ali Greene; grandson of Betty and Leonard Pollock of Pennsylvania. He will also be missed by many aunts, uncles, cousins and a world of friends.

Michael was the dear grandson of the late Matthew Emanuel Greene and the late Sylvia Greene Robins.

Interment was at Clover Hill Park Cemetery. Contributions may be made to the Michael Greene Fund of the Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple, West Bloomfield, MI, 48322. Arrangements by the Ira Kaufman Chapel. □