

The measure of a man

James Lockwood impacted many in his too-short life

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FLYER ADVISER

Elsewhere in this issue, *The Flyer* is running a story about Fairmont graduates who have gone on to do great things in their lives. My staff came up with the idea, and I think it's good to spotlight some of the wonderful things our alumni are achieving in areas such as sports, music and business.

But medals and titles aren't the only way to measure success. What about the people who simply live good, productive lives? Who become great parents, loyal soldiers, dedicated workers, good neighbors and devoted friends?

I've been thinking about this a lot lately - ever since the night of Sept. 23, when I learned of the sudden death of a former student. James Lockwood, 2002 Fairmont grad, was only 23 when he was killed by a drunk driver Sept. 21 in Tennessee. A U.S. Army specialist, James was five days from deploying to Iraq when the accident happened.

James had been a photographer on my yearbook staff his senior year. I hadn't known him before he applied, but he came highly recommended by all of his teachers, especially by Art Photo teacher Thom Meyer. Once James got on staff, I learned why his teachers were so fond of him.

James was the perennial nice guy; he didn't see color or economic differences. It didn't matter to him if you were an athlete or a scholar ... or neither. He approached his classmates (and teachers) with respect, a quick smile and a genuine interest in how their day was going.

And James was thoughtful. He knew I had had a hip replacement the year before he joined my staff, so he would scold me and take over if he saw me try to move one of the heavy boxes of yearbooks.

His mother, Linda McNamara, told me recently that she's heard similar stories from several people. "I just tried to teach him right from wrong," she said. "And then he snuck behind my back and became a great person."

James would drop by the high school every six months or so after he graduated to update a few of us on his life and adventures. In fact, he came by just two weeks before his death to tell us of his impending deployment to Iraq. My heart sank at the news, and I told him to keep his head down

and send an email once in awhile to let me know he was OK. He even agreed to be interviewed by one of my *Flyer* students via email while in Iraq.

But James didn't want to dwell on his upcoming deployment. "I have some other big news," he said, his trademark grin spreading across his face. "My girlfriend doesn't know it yet, but I'm going to propose to her before I go to Iraq."

Nine days later, the *Dayton Daily News* article referred to James' fiancée, Rachel Litteral, in a story about the fatal accident; she had been in the car, but was not seriously injured. That was the first I knew she had said yes.

I wasn't the only teacher at Fairmont in tears on that Monday after learning of James' death ... because I wasn't the only one whose life James had touched. Some of my students, seeing my red-rimmed eyes, named other teachers in the building they had seen in the same condition.

But I learned later that James has not quite finished giving to those he cared for ... and some he will never meet.

The day I spoke with his mother on her cell phone, she was in a dentist's office with two of James'

young nieces. He'd left explicit directions that in the event of his death, some of his life insurance should go toward orthodontic care for his three nieces and one nephew.

James also wanted to help his sister, Brandi Briddell, a '97 FHS grad. "His basic instruction to my mom was to help me so I wouldn't have to work two jobs," Brandi said. As a result, some of James' insurance also went toward paying off her car loan and some other expenses.

Brandi said she last saw her brother on Sept. 10, when he stopped by her office in Kettering before leaving town. "He never left without saying goodbye and giving me a hug."

James also left directions to give \$50,000 to Fairmont to establish a fund to provide an annual \$5,000 scholarship to a track athlete who wants to go to college but isn't likely to earn either an athletic or academic scholarship.

That's James. He wasn't the valedictorian or the star athlete. And the biggest newspaper article ever written about him came after his death.

But if a man's worth is measured by the lives he's impacted and the number of people who will never forget him, then James is one of Fairmont's biggest success stories.



James' sister, Brandi Briddell, took this photo of James and Rachel when she and some friends took him out to say goodbye before his deployment to Iraq.

COMMENTARY