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Community supporting family in grief

Sudden loss of teen mourned by family, friends and close-knit farming community

By R. Bruce McIntyre
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter
Renfrew – He was a farmer and it seemed like he was always on a tractor. He was a good student who planned to work on the family farm while at the same time earn a diploma as a certified welder. He could be a typical pain-in-the-ass teenager and then a minute later he was a smiley, energetic brother to his three siblings. He was goal-oriented and he was generous.

His name is Patrick John Arie van Lindenberg and without warning, this larger-than-life 15 year old died suddenly while on a date inside the historic O'Brien Theatre in Renfrew. His tragic death has galvanized an outpouring of community support.

Around 8 p.m. last Thursday, a chaotic scene inside and outside the theatre was unfolding. Minutes earlier, Patrick was seated with his movie-companion and suddenly he was silent, non-responsive and he stopped moving.

A 911-call was placed and minutes later, members of the Renfrew County Paramedic Service and the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) arrived. They made their way inside at the same time as theatre staff were quickly escorting all patrons out of the building. Paramedics assessed the situation and began critical life-saving measures in an effort to revive the young man.

OPP officers canvased the location and questioned patrons and friends of Patrick as they tried to figure out what led up to his sudden collapse. In the middle of all that confusion, someone contacted his older sister Hannah and informed her of Patrick's situation.

Dealing With Sudden Death

As paramedics attempted to revive Patrick, his sister Hannah began calling and texting their mother, Angela Field. On this night, she was Councillor Field, one of five members of Admaston/Bromley Township council. She was attending a 7:30 council meeting and about 30 minutes into the meeting, she received a call from her daughter. Seconds later, she received another call from the same number.

She did her best to ignore her daughter's cell number, but it ap-

peared again. Once she read her daughter's text telling her it was an emergency, she scrambled to pack up her materials.

"I knew it was something serious for Hannah to keep calling me and when I read that text, I couldn't get out of there fast enough. I wrote a short note to our CAO telling her there was some type of emergency and I had to leave. She said 'no problem' and told me to get going."

Fighting back tears, she recounted how her life completely changed in a matter of minutes in downtown Renfrew.

"I knew," she said as she wiped away the tears of a mother who realized her "mother's instincts" were correct. "My gut told me he was gone even before I spoke with the paramedics. I asked them if Patrick had any vitals from the time they arrived until they began life-saving measures. They told me none were recorded."

"Patrick was transported to RVH (Renfrew Victoria Hospital) and the trauma team did everything they could, but nothing could be done. My oldest son was gone and I felt like my whole life has just been stuffed into a blender and spit back out."

Family Devastated

The hospital ordered a toxicology screen and it came back negative for drugs in his system. Patrick died from an undiagnosed enlarged heart. For some unexplained reason, his heart stopped.

"We were told Patrick's heart was enlarged. The doctors have no idea how long his heart was enlarged or how it happened. He might have been born with it or he might have developed a virus. We likely will never know. It doesn't really matter how he died or why he died. We have to accept it and now try to move forward as a family."

Even in the middle of the worst time of her life, Ms. Field said there is one silver lining.

"When it happened, it is likely Patrick didn't feel a thing and it was over," she said. "I couldn't ask for more."

She and her husband, Barend van Lindenberg, had to share the devastating news with their three children, eldest daughter Hannah



Patrick John Arie van Lindenberg died suddenly last week inside the O'Brien Theatre in Renfrew while on a date. The energetic 15 year old was born with the skills of a veteran farmer and his family said from the time he turned five, there were very few times he was not driving a tractor or some other farm machinery around the family farm.

and Patrick's younger siblings, Jonah and Leila.

"Those conversations are the cruelest ones any parent would ever have to go through," she said. "When your children ask why and you can't answer that one simple question, the pain of looking into their eyes cannot be described. They all took it hard and this past Monday Leila planned to return to school, but after a short while, she went back to bed."

Born and raised in Sudbury, Ms. Field has had a steady flow of members of the Field family travelling from the Sudbury area to the farm.

They were joined by others who the family barely knew, but they wanted to help any way they could.

Mr. van Lindenberg, son of the late Arie van Lindenberg, began informing his family and friends in Canada and the Netherlands a few hours after Patrick's passing. His mother still resides in the area. His parents moved to Renfrew County in 1988 and along with their three children, started LindMilk Farms.

His late father succumbed to illness in September 2009, 10 months from the time he was diagnosed.

However, his passing did not

signal the end of LindMilk Farms because his two sons, Barend and Matthijs, assumed control of the operations. The farm remained in the family.

"When Patrick was born, we named him Patrick John Arie van Lindenberg," Ms. Field said. "Both his grandfathers died from cancer. Arie was diagnosed in November, 2008, just two months before Patrick was born and my dad (John Field) was diagnosed four days after Patrick was born. Arie only got to meet two of his grandchildren (Hannah and Patrick) and my dad died in

2018, but at least he got to know Patrick."

Along with the 200 Holsteins that live in the main barns or spend time roaming 1,400 acres belonging to LindMilk Farms, the young family also includes two dogs, Vader and Radar. As Ms. Field noted, the dogs are just like everyone else because they are feeling the effects of Patrick's absence.

"The other morning, Vader woke me up around 5 o'clock as the sun was rising," she said. "He wanted out so I let him out the back and he just quietly sat on the porch and stared straight ahead. He was Patrick's buddy and he misses him. Our other dog, Radar is feeding off of me and has pretty much been by my side during all this."

Larger Than Life

When asked to find the words that best sum up her son, Ms. Field did not hesitate when she said Patrick was 'larger than life.'

"He was always full of energy, and he used that energy to pursue his goals," she said. "From the time he could walk he was always making his way down to the barn. He was at his happiest there. When he started Junior Kindergarten, he told me wanted to stay home and work the farm instead of going to school. I will never forget his first day of school when the bus pulled up and Patrick leaped off the bus. Waving his hands with a giant grin, he said he loved school and was going to go every day. He was so happy."

Unlike most kids who sometimes do their best to avoid doing chores, Patrick embraced the chore list.

"He learned to operate and drive some farm machinery by the time he was five years old and when he got home each day from school, he headed straight to the barn and got to work," Ms. Field said. "Then he would hop on his dirt bike and ride around the farm in the warm months or drive a snowmobile during the winter."

With four active children, Ms. Field has only had to deal with emergency sirens twice during her time as a mother. Both times, the ambulances were dispatched for Patrick.

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Happy Birthday, Canada!





The van Lindenberg family sign, located at the entrance to LindMilk Farms on Foy Road, was the unofficial 'Welcome Mat' last night (Tuesday) for a long procession of vehicles filled with neighbours and strangers who passed by to pay their respects to the memory of Patrick van Lindenberg.

Overwhelming support

From front

The first time was in late December 2022. Patrick was driving his snowmobile along the property line when he misjudged the terrain and was thrown more than 30-feet from his sled.

"We called 911 right away because we knew he was in bad shape," she said. "He had five broken ribs, a collapsed lung, a ruptured spleen and four fractures in his pelvis. When the paramedics arrived he was loaded up and one of them said 'straight to CHEO with lights and siren on.'"

Despite his injuries and several doctors encouraging him to undergo multiple surgeries, he and his parents opted for him to come back home after a week in the hospital.

"I want to go home mom", he told me. "We took him home and he was up on crutches in less than two weeks and by the end of February, he regained most of his mobility without crutches. It didn't take long before he was back on the snowmobile and I wanted to say no, but he was determined. The doctors told us that his recovery was very rare and they could not explain his rapid progress."

Ms. Field said one of her son's best attributes was his determination to reach any goal he set for himself.

"When he was 12 years old, he wanted a dirt bike to drive around the farm," she said. "Next thing I know he went out and got some chickens and he sold enough eggs to buy a dirt bike. Although he almost died while driving a snowmobile, he saved up enough money to buy a Polaris 850 snowmobile. When he put his mind to something, there was no stopping him."

Community Support Is Overwhelming

After more than an hour sharing her memories of her late son with this reporter, Ms. Field said her son's death is not really newsworthy.

She said it is a horrible nightmare that she would never wish on anyone, but she said the real story is what is happening behind the scene. She said people should read about the generous members of this close-knit agricultural community and how they have made it a priority to show their support for her family.

"I had absolutely no idea how many friends I have...the last few days have been overwhelming not just for me, but for all of us," she said. "I come from Sudbury and did not grow up on a farm. When I see postings about planning a procession of vehicles along Foy Road and driving past our farm, I am left speechless. We are all going to be out there at the end of our laneway on Tuesday (last) night."

"Our relatives from Sudbury and Holland will see what I have been

trying to explain to them, but they really don't understand. I am telling them because this outpouring of community support does not happen where they live," she said. "Today, they are in the middle of an agricultural community and they will see we are part of a larger family. Our neighbours and some people we have never met are going to show us just how much they care."

"Patrick was part of a larger community, a community that will support one of their own in times of crisis. I am getting messages of support from people I would never expect to hear from. Nobody asked the organizers to do this and from what I hear, the numbers just keep getting bigger every hour."

"I really don't know if I'm prepared or how I will react when the procession makes its way to our farm. Who knows, I may break down when they drive by...but I am not going to ask them to call it off. They are hurting inside too. They understand what happened to Patrick could happen to anyone, even their own children. This is how they are dealing with this tragedy and that's okay with me."

A second procession is scheduled for today (Wednesday) and it will be a farm-equipment only caravan leaving ProTyre in west end Renfrew at 4 p.m. and travelling through the downtown to the Armouries about an hour later.

A *Celebration of Life* in honour of Patrick is scheduled for today (Wednesday) at 5 p.m. It is taking place at the Armouries and most procession drivers will attend. The celebration is open to all.

At seven o'clock, family friend Julie Keon will lead *Words of Remembrance* where she will try and make sense of a tragedy that has been felt throughout the area.

Life Goes On

What has gone unnoticed is the van Lindenegs own and operate one of the larger dairy farms in Renfrew County. As tragic as Patrick's death is, the 200 cows still have to be milked twice a day and they still get hungry. As well, they have to be routinely examined to ensure they are in good health.

"Life goes on and the cows don't know we are grieving," Ms. Field said. "Some of us have to use every ounce of energy just to get out of bed to face the day. I can only say thank you to everyone who is helping. Since we lost Patrick last week, I can't even recall when I did the regular farm work to keep our operation running."

"Family, friends and a few people I don't know have been in and out around the farm and they are taking care of the animals and everything else so that we can take care of each other. I honestly don't know what

we would do if we didn't have this kind of support."

While this reporter and Ms. Field were taking a short break while sitting at a table at the front of their home, a tractor driven by a student made its way past us. A few seconds later, a cattle transport truck drove in and parked at one of the barns. A man stepped out of the barn and helped the driver load a calf onto the truck.

It was later discovered the man was Tom McLeese.

He worked for the family several years ago and when he heard about Patrick's death, he drove from Dacre and did many of the same tasks he did years ago. The difference is this time he was not being paid.

"Like everyone, I couldn't believe it," he said. "I worked here and I know what it takes to keep this farm running. It's hard enough when things are good and I can only imagine how hard it has to be to keep going while dealing with Patrick's death. It's impossible. I will keep coming up from Dacre until I know they are ready to go."

An Awesome Day

Despite having to make it through the worst day of her life, Ms. Field considers herself fortunate.

"My last conversation was him trying to convince me he was going to hang out with the guys, and I could tell there was more going on," she said. "When he got home from school he told me he 'aced' his final exam and he would not be going to school (Renfrew Collegiate Institute) the next day."

Before he got ready to go to the movies that night, he convinced his mom to let him drive the family's newest car around the farm. Ms. Field reminded him he was only 15 and a person has to be 16 and licensed to be able to legally operate a car.

"He was determined and I knew he would keep asking so I let him drive the car around the property and I made sure he was driving slowly," she said.

Ms. Field knew her son was planning something, and she tried to figure it out.

"We brought home some pizza as I was running behind for my council meeting and Patrick ate his pizza pretty fast," she said. "I was in my bedroom getting ready and he was in the bathroom brushing his teeth. I asked him who he was going to the movies with and he said just some buddies."

"I knew he was up to something and I said to him, 'I don't think you are brushing your teeth for your buddies, dude'." He mumbled through his toothbrush and again he insisted he was going with some buddies. I just nodded my head and dropped it. I had no idea that would be the last time I talked to him."

As she neared the end of this interview that stretched out to almost 90 minutes, Ms. Field said up until he collapsed in the theatre, Patrick had what she considers "an awesome day."

"It is going to sound weird, but Patrick had an awesome day last Thursday," she said. "He did great on his test, he raced home to do farm chores; he drove our new used-car at the age of 15, he ate pizza...and he went on a date. Patrick had a great day and it is tragic we lost him so suddenly. But he had one of his best days and when he left us, he didn't feel any pain."

"Right now he is with his two grandfathers and he will get a chance to spend time with Arie, something neither of them got to do. He was lucky he got to spend time with my dad before he died."

"All I can say is if you come to the *Celebration of Life*, be positive like Patrick. Most of all, celebrate his memory and cherish every moment of every day with your family. I found out just how fragile life is and how your whole world can be turned upside down in a matter of seconds."

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