

Community united

Fund-raisers set for former residents who lost 2 children

By Jennifer Mitchell
, The News-Herald

STRONACH TWP. — The two children of a former Brownstown Township family were among three killed Nov. 16 in an accident on an icy stretch of M-55.

Former resident Marie Bennett, 39, was driving through the year's first snowstorm from Manistee to her home in Wellston when her vehicle collided with a semitruck.

Her children, Madison Bennett, 10, and Leeland Bennett, 14, along with their friend, Michael Potter, 13, also of Wellston, were killed.

Robert Gezelman, 47, of Blanchard was driving the other vehicle and was not injured.

Marie Bennett was stabilized at a Manistee hospital, and then taken to Spectrum Health Butterworth Campus in Grand Rapids in critical condition.

Though still in the hospital, she was moved out of the intensive care unit Thursday.

Bennett and her husband, Tom, had moved away from the Downriver area just a few months ago.

Area friends said that funeral expenses, hospital bills and missed work have been emotionally and financially devastating for the couple.

Those friends and former classmates are banding together to hold a Woodhaven fund-raiser, while other friends in Taylor are inviting people to the Sportsplex.

Both events are intended to alleviate the Bennetts' financial pressures.

A Woodhaven spaghetti dinner with a silent auction and live music will be held at the community center, 23101 Hall Road, from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Friday.

Woodhaven High School students will hold an on-site bake sale.

Girl Scout Troop 400, of which Madison was a member, also will be there.

For more information, e-mail rosetherese2@comcast.net or call Joe and Julie Hutchison, who are organizing the event, at 1-734-783-9911.

"Marie and Tom, they were members of our church, and Marie was just really involved in the community and that's why this has gotten so big," Julie Hutchison said.

"This (response by the community) is just the fruit of what their family has done in touching many, many lives."

Proceeds will go directly to the Bennett family and checks can be made payable to: The Bennett Family Memorial Fund.

Those who cannot attend but would like to donate can send a check to Bennett Family Fund-raiser, P.O. Box 911, Lincoln Park, MI 48146.

The Detroit Tornados women's hockey team, of which Bennett was a former member, will hold a fund-raiser Saturday.

Those who would like to participate in the skate and/or dinner at Taylor Sportsplex can visit the team's Web site at www.detroitornados.com for more information.

Teammate Kat Dillon said the Tornados have partnered with the Hockey Has Heart organization to help Bennett, and checks should be made payable to Hockey Has Heart with "friends of Marie" in the memo line. Donations are tax deductible and can be mailed to: Friends of Marie, c/o AIT22211 W. Warren, Suite 200, Dearborn Heights, MI 48127.

Credit card donations can be made at the Hockey Has Heart Web site at www.hockeyhasheart.com. "Friends of Marie" must be put in the comments or special requests box.

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