

Dylan lives on

Parents of boy killed in car crash plant schoolyard garden

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You won't find 7-year-old Dylan Richardson frolicking around the playground at Hall Elementary School on Aurora's West Side. You won't find him in the library reading books, or at a friend's house after school doing homework, either.

Dylan, the smiling boy with spiky hair and a toothy grin, died in a car accident July 13, 2007, near Sullivan and Orchard roads in Aurora. He would be in second grade.

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Lisa Richardson, mother of 7-year-old Dylan, puts some final touches on the courtyard garden that is dedicated to the life of her son. Dylan died in a car crash last year, and his parents worked through the rain Friday morning to finish the memorial at Hall Elementary School in Aurora.

photos by donnell collins / Special to the Beacon News

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Dan Richardson, Dylan's father, wears a T-shirt bearing a photograph of his late son while planting the garden at Hall School in Dylan's honor.

Yet while Dylan won't physically live on at the school, his memory lingers everywhere. On Friday, Dylan's parents, Dan and Lisa, finished planting perennials and spreading mulch around the courtyard they overhauled and dedicated to their son's memory.

Donations of approximately \$3,000 raised after Dylan's death were given to Hall School and the courtyard project.

"The school is special to the family," Dan Richardson said of Hall. "My kids went there, I went there, so did my brothers and sisters. There are a lot of memories (at Hall). I know Dylan loved it there, and unfortunately he can't continue."

Instead, Dylan lives on in the pink flowers blooming near the playground. In the courtyard benches that bear his name. He lives on in the memory of every kid who sits down to drift away into their imagination in the reading corner dedicated to the boy who loved books.

"Any child that is taken from us long before he's supposed to leaves an impressions on your heart," said Kathy Cunz, Dylan's first-grade teacher.

A 13-year-old girl in North Carolina can take this statement literally. She received Dylan's heart during a transplant operation. A 15-year-old Illinois boy received the little boy's liver.

Through the Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network, through which Dylan's organs were donated, the Richardsons found yet another way to keep their son's memory alive.

"He just keeps on going," Dan Richardson said of his boy.

So through the rainy Friday morning, Dan and his wife, along with landscapers from Spring Bluff Nursery out of Sugar Grove, kept right on going as well, planting through the downpour.

When they were done, the smell of wet mulch radiated through the school, and mud covered the courtyard grounds. But the blooming flowers and budding trees give the Richardsons hope, and the anticipation of hearing from donor recipients keeps the family going after tragedy. Recently they heard from a Kansas man who was saved with Dylan's kidneys.

"Your son saved my life. My hope is that you find joy and solace in knowing he lives through me," the man wrote in a letter sent to Dan and Lisa on Valentine's Day.

It is stories like this that the Richardsons eagerly await.

"We have not heard anything else so far," Richardson said. "But we look in the mailbox every day with anticipation."