

Community unites to help stricken teacher Griffin

By VICTORIA CLAYTON
Special to the Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The community has come together in a big way to assist a young teacher who suddenly found himself in need.

Last week, 28-year-old Jerry Griffin, a physical education teacher at the Carl T. Mitten School and bartender at the Washington Inn, headed to the gym for his usual Sunday morning



GRIFFIN

workout. Then, without warning, his life unexpectedly changed.

Griffin suffered a vertebral arterial dissection, a tear in one of the inner layers of the artery resulting in a merging of blood in the wall that partly or completely closes the flow of blood to the brain. This is one of the most common causes of strokes in young adults.

News of the tragedy quickly spread throughout the Cape May area. Within a couple of days, a gofundme.com account was established to help with the mounting medical bills not covered by insurance. Within 36 hours, more than \$30,000 was pledged, and at

deadline nearly \$90,000 had been raised.

Incredible right? Not really. This is what living in a small town is all about — coming together and building a strong support system.

While social media is often criticized, in this case it was the vehicle that united the community. The power of social media, when a tragedy occurs and community outreach is essential for prayer and healing, can be a blessing.

The comments throughout the gofundme page for Griffin expressed not only support and love, but spoke to the character of the young man with a huge smile and

compassionate temperament. Family, friends, local businesses and many of the students Griffin taught each and every day have sent their support his way.

Griffin has made tremendous improvement over the past few days. He is off the ventilator, doing exercises in bed to strengthen his body and his mobility is slowly recovering.

"I know my brother will have a complete recovery — 100 percent," Ryan Griffin said. "Jerry is a fighter, he's strong. And God is listening and answering our prayers — it's hard not to answer thousands of prayers."

Ryan Griffin said his entire family, especially his parents Carol and Jerry Griffin, are overwhelmed with the continuous outpouring of support.

"It's amazing and touching to see what this community has done for my brother," Ryan Griffin said.

Author Linda Howard once said "the bad thing about living in a small town was that everything became a personal issue. The good thing about living in a small town was that everything became a personal issue. During times of trouble, the support system was massive." I couldn't agree more.

Poetry, music help teen cope

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You reacted in anger
And "hated all of us"

When Avery was 2, her mother took her out of the situation when her dad was abusive to her older brother. Her dad was addicted to heroin, pills and, according to the stories told by her mother, everything he could get his hands on.

"He sold our dog," Avery said. "He sold our house. He sold our car. Anything he could get his hands on to sell, he would sell. Drugs ruled him. It is a powerful thing."

After they left her father, Avery's family became involved with the congregation at Tabernacle United Methodist Church in Erma. She has been singing in church since she was 4 years old and found comfort in singing as well as in writing poetry at a very young age.

"I was 10 years old when I wrote my first song," she said. "I would sit down with my phone and write."

But when she turned 13, Avery wanted to connect with her father who was living in Pamlico County, N.C., with her stepmother. So plans were made for Avery to spend the summer with her dad. But all of those plans changed on the first night, the night of her stepmother's birthday. Avery said her father hit his wife across the jaw with a whiskey bottle, breaking the jaw and getting blood all over Hannah.

Do you not see the pain
in my eyes?

No I guess not, I'm not
that surprised.

Who knew your own
blood,

Could be so harsh and
cold?

"This is the first time I'd
seen my dad and I was in
total shock," Avery said. "I thought he was clean but later he went into a truck outside his house. Later I found out that was

his dealer's truck. I really thought it would have been different. I was supposed to be there with him for the whole summer. I really thought myself, 'Hey, I'm going to see my dad,' and we could finally have a connection. But I needed to get out of there. I begged my uncle, my dad's brother, to take me to the Lewes ferry terminal in Delaware and then I handled it from there. I was there for six days; not even a week."

When she got home, Avery was so depressed that she thought about taking her own life to get back at her father.

"I wanted to but I didn't want to, you know," she said. "I wanted to do it because I wanted to say 'Look what you're doing to me.' But then I thought how it would hurt my brother and my mother who were both always there for me. That is when I decided I would never do that."

On her arm she has a tattoo stating "This Too Shall Pass," a quote some people credit to either Persian Sufi poets or, according to Jewish folklore, King Solomon.

"There is a reason I got this tattoo on my arm," Avery said. "I look at it as a constant reminder to myself that if this rough part of my life is passing, then any other trouble will also pass."

This moment in her past was a wake-up call to Avery. She needed to reconnect with God again, so she started going to church for reassurance.

In school, Avery dove into choir and piano, an instrument she taught herself to play by ear. She also found sanctuary in writing.

"I have always been into writing music and poetry," she said. "I truly believe that God is my sanity and music is my other sanity."

Drugs had led Avery's father to do some very bad things that eventually landed him in jail for vari-

ous crimes including theft, assault and battery and, ultimately, second-degree murder. Avery could have picked any topic for the poem. She picked drugs and picked her father because he has been on her mind lately, she said.

"He calls a lot but I don't really answer though," she said. "I answer here and there but I am trying to keep myself away from that. He's in prison for a reason. And it's sad because I know he wouldn't do that if he wasn't on drugs. I have seen him sober and he is a wonderful man."

The poem she wrote is mostly about her father but she also wrote it for others to relate to if they are having the same experiences.

"I want people to read this and think 'This poem could be about my mom or my uncle,'" she said. "I want others to relate to it so I wrote it universally. I never anticipated for the poem to be like this. I was so moved by what I was writing, I just got into it."

You take the time and effort
to show me

Who my father was supposed
to be

An honest man whose attentions
are so pure

But that's a lie because you
already rotted to your core

As for the future, Avery remains optimistic.

"Yeah, I forgive him," she said with a few tears but also a smile. "And I'm not the type to forgive, either. I can be hardheaded and blunt, but when it comes to him, I always forgive. It's our past. It's not now. It's not going to be again. If I see anybody on the same road I am on, I'll just say 'You have to keep pushing; just keep pushing. You got it.'"

I thank God everyday
That he didn't take my mom
away

Drugs are horrible. Proceed
with Caution
Or Stay away!!!

Lower to address unoccupied homes

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

VILLAS — No one wants to live near an abandoned home with an uncut lawn and sagging shutters.

Lower Township Council is considering creating an ordinance that would require owners of empty homes to register them with the township and to maintain the property.

During a March 6 council meeting, Councilman Tom Conrad said the township is examining a similar ordinance from Middle Township.

Solicitor Robert Belasco said code enforcement re-

ceived a number of calls to investigate abandoned properties, which resulted in citations being issued. He said the ordinance would require property owners to register their unoccupied home with the township clerk "so we can reach them expeditiously and have them address any issues that arise with respect to property."

"We're constantly searching for individuals to contact to address these concerns that are brought to the township's attention," Belasco said.

He said the ordinance would require homeowners to maintain their property or face fines from \$100 to

\$1,000. Individuals would be given the opportunity to correct the nuisances, Belasco said.

The ordinance would aid code enforcement in locating the owners of unkempt properties, he said.

Conrad said the ordinance would not apply to occupied homes whose owners may relocate for the winter. He said the ordinance would apply to bank-owned homes in foreclosure.

Some refinement of the wording of the ordinance may be needed before it is brought to a vote, Conrad said. Banks notify the township clerk prior to foreclosure, he added.



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Students mix water, borax and glue to create GAK during the Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math Festival on Feb. 23 at Cape May City Elementary School.

STEAM Festival

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of the Three Little Pigs but from the perspective of the wolf who was trying to blow

down their houses. The students were challenged to build a house that could not be knocked down with a hair dryer. Students had two chances to come up with a design that would survive the huffing and puffing of the wolf.

Second-grade teacher Sara El-Shoubary created a video of the event. A Styrofoam tray was provided as the foundation for the house with the walls and roof made of construction paper and two paper plates. Students had glue and tape to hold the houses together.

Some houses blew apart quickly to the delight of the students. Redesigns of the house often survived the hair dryer. One student used drinking straws to divert air over the house. Tin foil was also added to keep air out of some homes for the three little pigs.

Neuman said the exercise taught teamwork as the first-graders collaborated on the designs.

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TIDES : March 2017

DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
8	4:26	4:59	10:39	10:43
9	5:24	5:55	11:34	11:39
10	6:16	6:44		12:24
11	7:02	7:28	12:30	1:08
12	8:45	9:10	1:17	2:50
13	9:25	9:49	3:02	3:30
14	10:04	10:27	3:44	4:07
15	10:41	11:05	4:25	4:43

MOON PHASES

Full moon, March 12 • last quarter, March 20

Spring BREAK Specials

For the full list of specials, visit
CapeMayDaySpa.com

Island Hopper

2 1/2 hrs ~ \$230 (Value of \$295)

Can't get away? Take a mini-getaway with these three relaxing spa treatments: Warm up in the heat of our steam shower, followed by a volcanic stone massage and conclude with a botanical and seawater-infused facial. Let the journey begin!

Ocean Renewal

50min ~ \$105 (Value of \$145)

This ocean infused body wrap will transform the skin and transport the senses. After gentle exfoliation, you will be cocooned in a warm seaweed wrap — a mask full of detoxifying, re-mineralizing and firming components. Scalp and foot massage is incorporated for a relaxing finish.

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