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“Clayton’s lesson is don’t do drugs”

By Rachel Crumpler

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Like many teenagers, Clayton Smith thought he was invincible. Dreaming of Superman, Smith took on that identity; all his friends at Oliver Springs High School call him Superman. When the 17-year-old senior died from a drug overdose in November, his friends made T-shirts with the super hero’s emblem to honor Smith. His mother, Donna Forstrom, decided to take it a step further. She had Superman T-shirts professionally done, adding two words on the back: Clayton’s Lesson. She gave them out for free with only one stipulation – if anyone asked about the shirt, the student must explain Clayton’s Lesson. “He wanted to be a teacher,” said Chris Collett, recent Oliver Springs High School graduate and a good friend of Smith, “His lesson is don’t do drugs.” School Principal Terry Hacker echoed Collett, explaining the shortly before Smith died he told his guidance counselor about his plans of teaching. Hacker said he hopes Smith’s death taught a bittersweet lesson to the other students. “Everybody has a purpose in life,” Hacker said, “Maybe, there’s something we can learn from Clayton.” Forstrom’s voice still cracks when she talks about her son, but she thinks it is important to get his message out in the community while emotions are still running high. “So many parents would want to sweep it under the rug. They would not want to admit their child died of a drug overdose,” Forstrom said, “But I’m proud of my son and the life he lived. If it could happen to him, then nobody’s safe,” Forstrom said. “This way, they’re never going to forget it.” Oliver Springs senior Laura Hall is determined not to forget. She wears a wristband with Smith’s initials sewn into the cloth during each basketball game she’s played since his death. “At first it was really hard. We were shocked,” Hall said. “We have to move one, but we also have to remember,” Hall added, “When I look at my band, I remember it, and I can play hard for that reason.” Hall said Forstrom’s strength and dedication has helped many students deal with Smith’s death. “I think it’s awesome what she’s doing,” Hall said, “I know it means a lot to the kids at the high school.” In the effort to spread her son’s tragic message, Forstrom also printed 5,000 pamphlets titled “Clayton’s Lesson.” In them, she writes to parents: “What are the drugs that are killing kids today? It’s not the typical street drugs, it’s the drugs in your medicine cabinet! Watch for signs that your kids may be abusing these drugs. If you see any of these signs, find a way to deal with the situation

immediately. The life you save maybe be your child's." Forstrom and her husband Jon have spent many hours talking to pharmacists and doctors, getting more information about teen drug abuse and the illegal prescription drugs most commonly abused. After Smith died, medical examiner William Bennett said a prescription pain killer was found on the scene. "We just want to make sure that teens are aware of the drugs that are out there," Forstrom said. "The drugs now are 1,000 times more potent and addictive than the drugs around when we were young," she said. "They (parents) don't understand," Forstrom added, "I didn't until this happened." Forstrom hopes students, in particular, will learn from her son's death. "They think they're invincible," Forstrom said, "And it just takes one time. (Smith) was so well-known and had so many friends," Forstrom said. "They'll listen to each other if they won't listen to their parents." Forstrom has handed the pamphlets out at parades and schools, and now, she said, people are making their own photocopies of the lesson. Collett would like Clayton's Lesson to be told across the state, and then, across the nation. "I just hope it's able to reach more people," Collett said.