

State park drowning claims life of Celeste graduate

Written by By Betsy Blevins, Editor and Publisher
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A Celeste family is mourning the loss of a beloved family member after a tragic incident at Bonham State Park last Saturday. Several agencies responded to the park after a report of a young man entering the water and going under. The body of 20-year-old Jose Spradling of Celeste was recovered a short time later.

On Monday, Jerry Card, Special Education teacher at Celeste High School, remembered his former student.

“I taught Jose for two years. He was a special student who loved everyone and was full of life and vitality,” Card said. “He loved his family and he loved the special olympics, in which he excelled.”

Jose, who graduated from Celeste High School last May, won several trophies his Senior year in the Special Olympics track and basketball competitions. It was the CHS 400-meter relay team that he was a part of with his sister, Anna, that won the gold last year on April 20 in Terrell. In that same meet, he placed second in both the 100-meter dash and the standing long jump. In the basketball competition held in Melissa in January of 2011, he placed first, and a month later he won gold at a basketball skills competition. His sister, Anna, was quite a contender at each of these meets as well. His smiling face frequented the pages of last spring's editions of The Leonard Graphic after seeing so much success in the sports arenas.

“He never met a stranger, but made friends with everyone he ever met and was always concerned about the needs of other people,” Card said.

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His teacher also testified to the young man's strong faith and love for teaching a Bible lesson when he felt it was needed.

"He loved singing gospel music and would open his Bible and preach a sermon at the drop of a hat. He made wherever he was brighter, and heaven is brighter now with his presence."

Jose was the son of Sylvia and Danny Spradling of Celeste. His father, Danny, is employed at Dollar General in Leonard. On Sunday, the store had borrowed at least one employee from another nearby store, who was asking if customers would like to leave their spare change for the family, now in need of assistance for Jose's funeral costs.

Fannin County Game Warden Randolph McGee reports that around 3:45 last Saturday, May 5, he was alerted of a probable drowning at the state park. A recovery effort was started and an hour later, Spradling's body was removed from the water. McGee stated Spradling was at the park with a family group and had entered the water. Another source stated he had gone in to retrieve a football - something he loved to toss around with his brother, Cody, according to his obituary. McGee said Spradling was unable to swim and went under, and there were no other swimmers in the water. Judge Alan Hale pronounced death at 5 p.m.

In addition to donations that can be dropped off at the Leonard location of Dollar General, the funeral home in charge of Jose's funeral arrangements is also accepting donations to help defray burial costs. Checks can be mailed to Jones-Walker & Son Funeral Home and Cremation Service, 1209 Live Oak, Commerce, TX 75428.