

Alex Johnson Memorial Field Dedicated in Chester

Published *Tyler County Booster*, 4-18-19, by Michael G. Maness, www.PreciousHeart.net



City of Chester and Chester ISD dedicated the baseball field to Alex Neal Johnson on Friday evening, April 12, after a home baseball game.

Johnson, 21, died in a tragic accident when his Camaro lost control west of town and hit a tree near midnight on May 11, 2013. Investigators thought he died on impact, yet right after impact the car burst into engulfing flames, then rolled down a ravine causing a grass fire. The charred wreck sight was horrifying, and the shocking news quickly spread through Chester.

After a tight game through the first five innings, the Chester Yellowjackets pulled ahead of the Zavalla Eagles with several plays and a near grand slam to win 9 to 4. In an excellent example of sportsmanship, the two teams lined up east-west and filed by as each player shook their rival's hand—a fine setting for the dedication to follow.

Chester First Baptist Pastor Hails Taylor gave the invocation after a few words recalling his friendship with Johnson and the honor of baptizing him.

Chester ISD Superintendent Cory Hines said that after Pam Vinson approached him on this, the ISD board did not hesitate to affirm the dedication. Hines said, "We will always play hard for Alex, and continue to make improvements to the school." Hines thanked Head Baseball Coach Marty Thompson for how well the field looked, better now than ever.

Chester Mayor Floyd Petri proceeded with fond memories of Johnson coming to his home, as the kids made use of his high-speed internet to play video games. Johnson was like family and would come at all hours visiting his grandson, Tanner Pratt, and other students. One particularly humorous habit of Johnson was when he had to run home—for any odd reason and return—he would put any shoes handy, no matter who’s they were, several times putting on his wife Barbara’s shoes. “Alex was easy to get along with,” said Petri. Such was how close to the family he became, a veritable brother to Tanner who named his own child after his friend Alex and has a tattoo in remembrance.



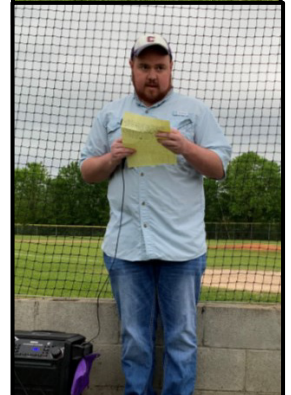
With the whole city council present, Petri exercised his mayoral prerogative to call a special council meeting to make an official proclamation. “In loving memory of Alexander Neal Johnson ... aka, Alley Cat,” read Petri, who then declared Johnson a “favorite son of Chester,” and May 24, 2019, Johnson’s birthday, as “Alley Cat Day”! He asked Johnson’s mother, Jeannie Johnson, also a council member, to come forward and receive the signed proclamation.

She came with tears, as all applauded.

Brandon Johnson, the older brother, thanked the city and school officials who helped make their small-town so special. “We cannot thank you enough,” he said, affirming that everything their family does was to help the city and school. “It’s beautiful and I love it.”



As a fellow student with Johnson, Sam Handley recalled their four-year-old days in T-ball and growing up to play as Yellowjackets. Handley said Johnson played with an “unrivaled joy and child-like enthusiasm. There was hardly ever an inning in which he did not come off the field with the huge grin he was so famous for. Alex always ‘left all on the field’.... I’ve never been prouder to call someone my teammate and friend.... He was loved by all and an enemy to none.”



For Texas Representative James White (Dist. 19), who wanted to be here, Cydnye Coutran read a proclamation recalling Johnson’s graduating with honors in 2009, his athletic talent, and love of baseball. His determination and “can-do spirit” made him a joy to coach. “He was a young man who always looked to the future with optimism, and he made every effort to uplift those around him.” He was a member of the Chester Volunteer Fire Department and a little league coach, and he donated each month to the St. Jude Foundation in honor of his two healthy nephews.



Chase Franklin, son of Johnson’s coach Tracy Franklin, noted Johnson’s “enthusiasm for life and baseball.... Everybody he was around, he touched their heart.” He always was in a good mood.

In closing, Ashlyn Overstreet in Ladyjacket uniform stepped forward and led all in the school song, “Hoorah for good ol’ Chester, best in the land; Chester’s school spirit always wins a hand, a helping hand, and we will shine forever onward our best to you.”

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