

Published September 29th, 2021

Lafayette community gathers at celebration of life

By Jennifer Wake



Jazz music filled the air in the back field of Stanley Middle School in Lafayette Sept. 22 as hundreds gathered to celebrate the life of crossing guard Ashley Dias, who was struck and killed Sept. 8 in front of the school. In honor of the former Stanley student who had played the saxophone in Bob Athayde's music class in 1990, two of Dias' former classmates returned to campus to play "I Will Remember You" on the guitar and flute.

Stanley principal Betsy Balmat opened the ceremony by telling those gathered that "tonight is not meant for sadness but celebration. We come together tonight as a community to heal . and to celebrate the life of Ashley Dias."

Photo J. Wake

Several of Dias' family members spoke of this "fun-loving friend with a self-deprecating sense of humor." A neighbor of the Dias family, Gretchen Placzek, said, "Ashley became a crossing guard while running clinical trials for cancer patients. He called it his `side hustle.' . Ashley was a gift to everyone who encountered him."

His mother, Gloria Dias, said, "We celebrate his gift of life on Earth and the lives of the children he saved." She spoke about how she and her husband, Fabio, had lunch with Dias that fateful afternoon and "in a blink of an instant he was gone."

Gloria Dias expressed her gratitude for all the community support - the homemade cards, the hugs, the calls and the home cooked meals - and for "a glimpse of Ashley through your eyes," adding, "Hold your children close and always tell them you love them."

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