

Christie Brungardt – Jana’s Campaign

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

July 3, 2008. It was one of those terrible, horrific moments when one’s worst fears become reality. The police detective walked into the room and said to the parents: “Brace yourself. We found Jana. She is deceased.” It is every parent’s worst nightmare. In that moment, Curt and Christie Brungardt knew that their twenty-five year old daughter was gone.

After the shock came the realization that something must be done. As Curt and Christie said, “We have two choices. We can grieve, or we can grieve and act. We chose the latter.” This is the story of Jana Mackey, a victim of domestic violence, and the remarkable campaign based on her life. It’s today’s Kansas Profile.

Drs. Curt and Christie Brungardt are faculty members at Fort Hays State University. Curt, a Garden City native, studied at Fort Hays State and ultimately helped found the leadership studies program there. He later earned a doctorate at K-State.

Christie grew up in Harper County, fifteen miles from the rural community of Anthony, population 2,361 people. Now, that's rural.

After graduation from Northwest Oklahoma State, Christie started a commodities brokerage business in Anthony and later opened an office in Hays. She returned to school and earned a master's in leadership studies at Fort Hays State, where she met and married Curt. At the urging of an administrator, while a graduate student, Christie agreed to teach a class at the university. She found she loved it and ultimately joined the faculty, earning a Ph.D. from K-State as well. In 2002, the Brungardts founded the Center for Civic Leadership at Fort Hays State to expand regional civic engagement throughout the region.

Daughter Jana grew up at Hays and went to KU. She changed her major from music to women's studies, as she became passionate about women's rights and became an advocate for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. She lobbied on these issues at the statehouse and entered the KU law school.

Then on July 3, 2008, the absolutely unthinkable happened. Jana was murdered at the hands of her ex-boyfriend in his home in Lawrence. As one friend said, due to Jana's expertise, the last person who she would expect to be a victim of domestic violence was Jana. "It can happen to anyone or anyone's family," Christie Brungardt said.

The tragedy appeared senseless. More than a thousand people attended Jana's funeral. Curt Brungardt challenged those in attendance to carry on the legacy of Jana's work and advocacy.

That led to the creation of something called Jana's Campaign, Inc. Jana's Campaign has the mission of reducing gender and relationship violence. The program seeks to help break the cycle of domestic and dating violence and be a catalyst for social change. Jana's Campaign has five program areas: Public awareness and community action; education, prevention and intervention; public policy advocacy; campus action; and engaging men and boys to reduce gender violence.

For example, in the public policy arena, Curt and Christie actively worked on proposed legislation to assist the criminal justice system in documenting crimes involving domestic violence. In 2010, the Governor signed the most comprehensive legislation dealing with domestic violence in the state's history.

"We're seeing lots of growth in the program areas of campus action and engaging men and boys," Christie Brungardt said. With the Brungardts' help, the football coach at TMP in Hays is doing a program on Coaching Boys into Men which helps teach young men issues of respect and awareness of gender-based violence.

“If there was a mastermind to Jana’s Campaign, it was Curt,” Christie said. “His single focus outside of work is to advance this cause.”

For more information, go to www.janascampaign.org and www.1100torches.org.

It’s time to leave Curt and Christie Brungardt. They are leading Jana’s Campaign in memory of their daughter but also because her story is a lesson and an inspiration for all those who care about domestic violence.

In many ways, their work mirrors the socially engaged leadership which the Brungardts teach in their classes. “We decided to live our discipline of civic leadership and model behaviors,” Curt said. “Let’s change the world. Let’s make a difference.”

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.