

Obituary: St. Paul's Bonnie Blackmore started Central High retreat in honor of late son

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In the loss of her teenage son, Bonnie Blackmore found a calling that made his high school a more welcoming place.

Blackmore, who helped start a unique freshman retreat at St. Paul's Central High School, died earlier this month of respiratory failure. She was 71.

In 1987, Blackmore survived a car accident that left her paralyzed. Her son Cameron, who was 17 at the time, died in the crash. He was a senior at Central.

Six years later, Blackmore approached Central officials about donating money for a freshman retreat in honor of Cameron. The goal was to bring the new students together for a day early in the school year so they could get to know one another.

She also started the Cameron Blackmore Award that is given to an exemplary Quest student at the end of each school year. Quest is a humanities-based curriculum at the school.

"She was fearless," is how Murray Blackmore described his mother. "She was also a tremendously generous person and was constantly trying to give back."

With Bonnie Blackmore's help, the retreats have continued each year. More than 150 students ride charter buses to Camp Kiwannis in Marine on St. Croix, where they play games, connect with student leaders and staff, and learn about the values and traditions of Central.

"She believed that's what Cameron would have wanted," said Teri Lentsch, assistant principal at the high school. The retreat costs around \$16,000 to put on every year; Blackmore donated at least \$2,000 to \$3,000 annually.

At the end of the retreat, the freshmen would put together a scrapbook, write letters, or produce a video thanking Blackmore, said Jack Schlukebier, a Central High teacher who helps run the retreat.

"She was very kind and inspirational," Lentsch said.

Blackmore died the weekend of this year's retreat. School officials are determined to continue the program.

"I would meet with her every year to plan the retreat and I am really going to miss seeing her," Lentsch said. "We will keep the program going ... because it's a great program."

Born in Montana, Blackmore studied at the University of Minnesota, where she served as editor-in-chief of the Minnesota Daily before graduating with first a bachelor's degree and then a master's degree in journalism.

Blackmore is survived by her daughters, Jenny Blackmore of Boulder, Colo., and Leah Blackmore of White Bear Township; her son Murray Blackmore of Milwaukee; her brothers Dan and John Marsh; and three grandchildren.

A memorial service is planned for 2:30 p.m. Oct. 6 at First Congregational Church, 500 Eighth Ave. S.E., in Minneapolis.

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