

Hays Daily News Article

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LAWRENCE - In life, she wowed people with her song and dance and smile - both on stage and off. In a service honoring Jana Mackey's life Wednesday afternoon, speakers gave a crowd of 1,100 in Liberty Hall ways to carry on that spirit after her death.

Mackey, 25, a second-year law student at the University of Kansas, was found dead a week ago today in the home of an ex-boyfriend - about two weeks before her 26th birthday.

Adolfo Garcia-Nunez, 46, was apprehended by police in New Jersey the next day and subsequently committed suicide while in custody.

Thus began the daunting task of preparing for a funeral of a young loved one.

But Wednesday's service wasn't about death.

It was all about Mackey's life, one packed with energy and purpose.

Mackey grew up in Hays, and, after an active childhood that included dancing and acting and academic honors galore, she went to the University of Kansas.

If it seemed like Mackey accomplished a lot in her first 18 years, her last eight were full and running over.

She graduated with a degree in women's studies and started work on a law degree at KU.

A political activist, Mackey was a lobbyist for social justice. She worked as an advocate for a nonprofit organization that provides support for survivors of sexual assault.

This summer, she was enrolled in a project in which she represented state and federal prisoners.

"Jana drew her circle large," said Gail Agrawal, dean of the School of Law at KU. "I regret more than I can say that we will not come to know the lawyer Jana would have been."

In short, Mackey touched a lot of people.

That's why family and friends decided to have her services in Liberty Hall in downtown Lawrence.

They were expecting a lot of people, many who came from Hays and Fort Hays State University, where Mackey's mother and stepfather, Christie and Curt Brungardt, both work in the leadership studies department.

The service had to be delayed to give time to seat everyone after they stood in line for more than a block on Massachusetts Street.

With a large screen photo of Mackey as a backdrop on stage, speakers talked about "picking up Jana's fallen torch" and "carrying her causes forward" since "she was not given enough time to personally alter the course of history."

Curt Brungardt told the crowd that while everyone wonders "Why?" and "Why now?" her family has decided it must honor Mackey by carrying on her life rather than by mourning her death.

"She had so much work to do, and she had just started making a difference," Brungardt said.

"Through her death she can touch many lives. Her single torch has turned to 1,100 torches here today."

"Most funerals celebrate a person's life; that's not enough for Jana," he added. "This ceremony is a call for action. I'm now handing you her torch. Make Jana proud, and go do great things."

The ceremony ended with a letter written by her mother.

"Thank you for the joint process," wrote Christie Brungardt, "of raising each other the past 25 years."

- Memorials in Mackey's memory include the Northwest Kansas Domestic and Sexual Violence Services in Hays and the Jana Mackey Support for Public Advocacy Fund at the KU School of Law, in care of Rumsey-Yost Funeral Home, 601 Indiana, Lawrence, KS 66044.