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PRESS RELEASE

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RECENT VIANNEY GRAD SUCCUMBS TO SKIN CANCER BUT STARS IN PREVENTION FILM BEFOREHAND

March 31, 2008—The greeting line at his wake, snaking from the flower-bedecked casket through the great hall at Armbruster Mortuary out to the front entrance, spoke for David Long's popularity. Succumbing on Friday, March 28, to the malignant melanoma (skin cancer) that first struck during his freshman year at St. John Vianney High School, the 19-year-old former South County resident drew others to him, as was always the case in life. "He never met a stranger," said a slightly older close cousin, Tom Maitz. "He could talk to anyone about anything."

A short film released nationally by the Melanoma Hope Network features just that: David Long speaking out, along with a female cancer patient, about the need to protect against a deadly cancer that's on the rise, especially in youth. Forced tanning and unprotected sun exposure are some of the main causes of skin cancer, Long testifies in the ten-minute film, called "S.P.O.T.S." Looking strong and sounding wisened after on-and-off cancer treatments, Long belies the bed-ridden boy he'd become not longer after filming the video. His dad, Jim Long, said girls who see the film ooh and aah over his handsome, articulate son. David's mother, Joan Long is the former President of the Bar Association of Metro St. Louis. He has a 12-year-old brother, James (aka "Peeps") Hayden Long.

Scores of friends, family and acquaintances attended the wake, in advance of Long's Funeral Mass, held at Vianney High School, Tuesday, April 1, at 4 p.m. Those paying respects picked up scrolls in baskets throughout the hall that highlighted the many experiences Long had had: championship basketball games in grade school, a chance to rap with Rich Boy, a request by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas to pose with him in a photo, a visit to Ground Zero in New York, a trip by Make-A-Wish to County Clare in Ireland, an encounter with Kanye West at the Pageant, endless volunteer forays, including years of service to Project Angel Tree sponsored by the Bar Association, ski trips, tours of the Smithsonian, National Holocaust Museum and other educational outlets, ongoing sports attendance and much more. In short, a full, full life in a short, short time.

“He lived like someone who knew he had a life-threatening illness—every day counted,” said Dad Jim Long. Jim Long’s twin, Tim Long, shared the burdensome travel with David’s parents to receive ongoing clinical trial treatments for his nephew at the University of Virginia. “He was like a son to me,” said Tim Long. Both dad and uncle marvel at the resilience David showed up to the end. “He lost the use of his legs two weeks ago. Within hours of learning that, he was on his way with me to the store to buy a wheelchair. Nothing stopped him,” said Jim Long.

Cousin Tommy Maitz, David Long’s companion, said it was hard to arrive at Murray State University last fall, where David had just started college, to be with him after news came in that the cancer had returned. David had had a radical lymphectomy as a freshman after doctors removed an overgrown mole on the side of his neck. The surgery and subsequent treatments bought him several more years, but stomach pains the first week of college revealed cancerous re-growth.

Despite his battles with cancer, despite his depressing condition, he kept connecting with others, said Maitz. “I couldn’t believe the number of students he’d already befriended after just a week away at college. After seeing a movie one night, we stood outside and the whole theater crowd came up to say hi to David.”

Most touching to Dad Jim and Uncle Tim was the loyalty and love shown by David’s best friend, Josh Russell, a fellow classmate at Vianney. When David was given eight weeks to live, Josh dropped out of Mizzou to move in with his buddy, sleep by his side and be there when he died. Sobbing at the wake, Josh didn’t have much to say, except that he’d miss his friend, who’d given him much along the way.

Vianney Principal Larry Keller said it’s a testament to David that so many classmates from high school came in from out of town to attend his wake and funeral. “His classmates were supportive of David all through school, they prayed with and for him, and they still do now,” Keller said.

To see the Melanoma Hope Network film and to read David’s story in his own words, visit caringbridge.org. Type in David Long at the search prompt.

Media representatives, please print/tell David’s story to spread word about skin cancer prevention and to inspire others with his positive attitude.

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