

Outstanding Brother Remembered

Leading by Example

Nick Napolitano '10 was a loyal person who always put others before himself, a spirited young man who lived life to the fullest with no regrets, and a tremendous leader who made sure those around him always felt valued and respected. He led by example, never boasting about his own accomplishments (and there were many), and put everything he had into making a difference.

“Even as subjective as I am toward my son, I’m just amazed by the extraordinary things people said about him in the more than 1,000 letters and emails we received,” Nick’s father, Val, said. “He was a tremendous leader and was successful in all aspects of his life. He knew the balance between having a love for life and hard work.”

As a Psi Delta, Nick was immediately able to put his leadership skills to work. He was asked to be his pledge class president, responsible for organizing his class and setting the example. He was then unanimously voted to be Chapter President, a task that came with a lot of responsibility. Rather than simply go through the motions, he took his role seriously and worked hard to make an impact on Psi Delta. As a testament to his leadership skills, Delta Kappa Epsilon established the Nick Napolitano Award for Presidential Excellence, which will be awarded each year to the most responsible DKE Chapter President in the U.S. This year’s inaugural award was given to Tucker Howard, Epsilon Rho '12.

Raising Awareness

Nick passed away on August 7, 2011, at Brenton Point State Park in Newport, R.I., after jumping into dangerous waters to save a drowning Fraternity brother. After much struggle, Nick was able to get his brother to safety. However, due to high wind speeds and intense waves, Nick continued to be pushed out further and further. It was reported that, due to the conditions, not even the Coast Guard could make it to the area that day.

“He fought as hard as he could, but someone can only hold on so long. There is no question in my mind that what Nick did that afternoon, by going into an area with 40 mph winds and 10-foot waves to save a fellow Fraternity brother who was drowning, was in his DNA,” Val said. “He was a strong swimmer and had total confidence in himself. He couldn’t sit back while someone else was in trouble and do nothing. If he had the opportunity, I know he would do the same thing again.”

The accident occurred in an area where it’s unlawful to swim, jump, or dive. After visiting the site and seeing no visible signs posted, Val’s wife, Regis, did some research and found out that several areas are designated as non-swimming by law, but many have no signage at all or just a sign that says to stay off the rocks.

To bring attention to this problem, Val and Regis are spearheading an effort to add signage to dangerous areas, including the state park area where Nick lost his life, to help avoid future tragedies. “Our cause is to simply enforce the laws that are already in place. If you were pulled over for running a stop sign but there was no sign, how would you know?” Val said. “If a sign were posted, maybe Nick’s friend wouldn’t have jumped in that day and Nick would not have had to make the decision he did. We know it’s just one small piece of what could have happened, but these areas are incredibly dangerous, and our hope is that more signage will help get this message across.”

To help spread their message to a larger audience, Val and Regis will be launching a public service campaign that will feature commercials talking about the dangers in these areas. “If we can save one life by this, our efforts will be worth it,” Val said.

Legacy Lives On

To honor Nick’s passing, friends and family have established numerous scholarships and awards in his name:

- The Annual Nick Napolitano Soccer Tournament was established by his former high school, Westminster, for alumni participation. Westminster has also retired Nick's soccer jersey.
- The Nicholas Val Napolitano Memorial Fund was established to support areas Nick felt strongly about and made an impact on, including athletics and community service.
- The Nick Napolitano Best Buddy award established by Northside Youth Organization recognizes the volunteer who makes a difference and puts others first during the handicapped baseball season.
- The Nick Napolitano Defensive Player award established by Westminster High School recognizes a varsity soccer athlete who upholds Nick's commitment to teamwork, leadership, and respect. In respect, Nick's #2 will be worn by the team's varsity players and his soccer jersey has been retired.
- An endowed scholarship at Wake Forest supports Psi Delta brothers who exemplify the characteristics of a leader and will be awarded each year to a Deke brother.
- The Nick Napolitano Award from national headquarters is given to an undergraduate president of any fraternity in the U.S. for exceeding the demands of his office.
- The No Greater Love award is given annually to a senior at Westminster who exemplifies Nick's characteristics of leadership and integrity.
- A Gathering Place, a park built at the Northside Youth Organization in honor of Nick, symbolizes his strength in being able to bring people together

“We are incredibly amazed by the number of people Nick impacted during his short 23 years,” Val said. “We were blessed with the most extraordinary son anyone could ask for, and we love our children more than anything.”

Nick graduated from Wake Forest University with his bachelor's degree in finance in 2010. After graduation, he began working for CIT Healthcare as a financial analyst in New York City. In addition to his parents, Nick leaves behind his sister, Olivia, a sophomore at Auburn. To learn more about Nick, the Nicholas Val Napolitano Memorial Fund, his family's efforts to increase signage, and hear from those who sent in letters and emails, visit www.nicholasvalnapolitanomemorialfund.org.