



Engineering student Justin Clark used humor, faith to get through tough times

(ED. NOTE: The following article appeared in the February 14, 2007 edition of The Crimson White, the student-published newspaper of The University of Alabama. It is reprinted here with permission.)

By Charity Scott
Assistant Student Life Editor
The Crimson White

TUSCALOOSA — Some people just intuitively know what it takes to be a good friend, and Justin Clark was one of those people, his roommate, Drew Shepherd, said.

"He listened better than anybody I ever met in my life," Shepherd said. "He was the best friend anybody could ever ask for."

Clark, who lived his entire life with muscular dystrophy, died from pneumonia at DCH Regional Medical Center Monday afternoon, UA spokeswoman Deborah Lane said.

The 20-year-old junior majoring in industrial engineering was confined to a wheelchair, but Shepherd said he never let it confine his spirit.

"He was one of those guys

where you couldn't tell him he couldn't do something," he said. "He'd prove you wrong."

Clark achieved many things others would call impossible for a person in his situation, such as attending college and going hunting, Shepherd said.

"His clear, distinct goal was to make it to college, and he did that," he said. "He accomplished everything he set out to."

Clark also ran for senator of the engineering college in 2005, and won, said Ruth Garrett, a junior majoring in electrical engineering.

"He never complained and never got down on himself," she said. "He understood that his life was precious, and he never took it for granted. He knew every second counted."

Garrett said she met Clark in a computer science class her freshman year, and they helped each other through tough schedules.

"I helped him pass differential equations, and he helped me pass Calculus II," she said.

Garrett said Clark was more than just a student. He also enjoyed

going out with friends, watching movies and rooting on the Crimson Tide.

"He loved Alabama football," she said. "He carried a football in his wheelchair with him everywhere, and when he saw any of the football players he'd have them sign it for him."

Clark was born in Toxey to Pam and Derrick Clark. He has a younger sister named Whitney, who is 14.

Clark's sense of humor and strong belief in God kept him optimistic no matter how bleak his situation may have looked to people who didn't know him well, Shepherd said.

"He didn't limit himself," he said. "As long as I've known him, we've never discussed his disability because he didn't have one."

(ED. NOTE: Justin's funeral was held Thursday at Heritage Church of God in Gilbertown. He was an inspiration and a blessing to so many and the mark he left behind will not be forgotten. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family. -- The Sun.)

Lisman Council hears how master plan could create opportunities for development

By Tommy Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

LISMAN — A master community development plan, such as her group would compile, could be a wonderful tool in helping the people of Lisman decide how to go about re-vitalizing and promoting their town.

Cheryl Morgan, AIA, a Gresham Professor of Architecture and Director of the Urban Studio at Auburn University's Birmingham campus, told the Lisman Town Council on Monday evening that if the town chooses to use their service, a prestigious team of architects, design experts, and students would come in and spend several days assessing the community and talking to local residents.

"We would then draft a master development plan that is both comprehensive and 'user friendly,'" she said.

"One of the things that is so wonderful about Lisman and this entire part of west Alabama, is that so many of natural resources and tourist attractions are located here, within touching distance," she said.

Morgan's group is even now putting the finishing touches on a master plan for the Town of Gilbertown, and has done plans for Uniontown, York and more than 40 other small towns in Alabama.

Morgan — who said she has close family ties to Lisman through her great aunt, Mamie Thornhill — said that communities often know they want to make changes but don't know how to go about making those changes happen.

"Where do you want to be in five, ten or twenty years?" she asked. "You would tell us that and we will take that into consideration in devising a plan that will help you look forward, to think about not only your current generation, but generations yet to come."

While every community has problem areas and "sore spots" that need cleaning up or repairing, she said that often more time is spent on the "nickel and dime" than on what really needs attention.

"What happens is, we spend so much time on things like patching

potholes, that we neglect the things that will make a town the kind of place you want to live in the long-term sense," she said.

The group will take into consideration all of the positive things about the community, the dreams and wants of the citizens, as well as addressing what to do about any "eyesores" or negative issues that are discovered.

"For instance, I'm sure you have some beautiful old cemeteries, houses, and famous sons and daughters that you are proud of," she said. "We want people to get excited about the community and realize that you have as much to offer tourists and your own citizens as many other communities do, you just need to step back and take a look at it from a different perspective."

And that, she said, is where her group does its best work.

"We come in with 'fresh eyes' and remind you of why this place you call home is special and important," she said.

She said that improving the overall appearance of the town, planting trees, adding some recreational facilities, and opening up some homes for "bed and breakfast" lodging, the town would be in a much better position to attract new residents and new businesses.

"We ask you up front, what's important to you? If it doesn't make sense to you, if it's not important to you, then it's not going to work," she said. "A lot of times in Alabama, we can be kind of pitiful, and we tend to set our sights and our goals, way too low. I would rather set goals that are too high than too low."

Morgan said that money often follows good ideas.

"There is some money at the state and federal level that can help you with some of these goals," she said.

Part of the package that her group will provide will include large, colorful architect's renderings of what the "finished product" will look like, as well as several thousand copies of fold-out brochures that can be given out or mailed to prospective tourists, res-

idents, or even businesses seeking to locate in the area.

"You can use these to market Lisman or you can use them to solicit grants and other projects," she said.

Mayor Thomas Jackson asked what part of the town would the study focus on, since Lisman doesn't really have a traditional "downtown" area.

"We would look for the area that is the core of the community," she said. "You have a high volume of traffic on Ala. 10, and now that you have the City Hall here at the old school, this could become a village center more than a town center."

But, she added, the old, historic downtown area could also be developed because it is still home to the Post Office, several churches, and the median which divides the street.

"You have an economic connection to the river and to your hunting resources," she said. "People who hunt and fish spend money, and they will travel great distances to come to a place like Lisman. Tourists generate sales for your businesses, and new businesses could spring up as a result. These people need everything from fishing tackle to places to stay, from gasoline to sandwiches. You have a collection of older historic homes here. Those could become 'B&B's'."

Have worked in communities as small as 59 people up to 800 or more.

"I have been to Lisman lots of times as a child when my father's aunt lived here, so I feel like Lisman is a part of my home, too," she said. "I'd love to see the town come together and decide where you want to be in the future. Our goal is to help you be the best you can be."

Because there was not a quorum present, the council could not vote on the proposal. Mayor Jackson thanked Morgan for her presentation and said the board would discuss whether or not to authorize the plan at a future meeting.

Sun Country Calendar

There is no charge to list an upcoming non-profit or charitable event for your church, school, civic group, fire department, etc. Meetings of governmental entities may also be included. Send your announcement as far in advance as possible. Calendar items may be mailed, faxed, sent by U.S. Mail, delivered in person to our offices in Butler or Gilbertown, or left in our drop box at The Country Corner in Butler.

Tuesday, Feb. 20th

CLEAN UP CHOCTAW COUNTY meeting, and discussion about the possible establishment of a countywide recycling program, 7 p.m., Gilbertown Town Hall. All interested persons and elected officials are invited and encouraged to attend.

REACH 2010 will hold its monthly meeting at 6 p.m. at Shiloh Baptist Church in Silas. All members are urged to attend.

Friday, Feb. 23rd

GRANDPARENTS' DAY, South Choctaw Academy, 10 a.m., in the gym.

Saturday, Feb. 24th

COOPER'S CHAPEL 10th ANNUAL LADIES SEMINAR, Mary Ann Jones, guest speaker. Luncheon speaker is Brenda Hopkins. Special music. Continental breakfast and lunch will be served. To register call 601-776-5057 or 601-776-6659. Cooper's Chapel is located on Hwy. 511 two miles east of Quitman.

CHOCTAW CO. UNIT, Alabama Democratic Conference, election of officers, 10 a.m. until noon, Choctaw Co. Courthouse. For more information contact chairman C.D. "Budd" Ruffin at (205) 459-3299.

SINGING, Lusk Assembly of God, 6 p.m. Featured singers Crimson City along with local talent.

GREATER FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, Pastor's Aide Committee is sponsoring a Gospel Explosion, 6 p.m. All soloists and choirs are invited.

Sunday, February 25th

FRIENDS DAY, Gilbertown Church of God, 10:30 a.m., guest speaker Rev. Tim Brimm. Lunch will be served. Pastors Rev. and Mrs. Fred Wiley, Associates Rev. and Mrs. Scott Loper.

INSTALLATION SERVICE for Rev. Lavon Gathright, 3 p.m., John The Baptist Missionary Baptist Church, Hallsell. Rev. Tony Campbell, pastor of Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Meridian, will be the guest speaker.

Monday, Feb. 26th – Friday, March 2nd

BLACK HISTORY PROGRAM, Morning Star Baptist Church, Ala. Hwy. 17N, Butler, 7 p.m. each night. Sponsored by the Indian Springs Branch of the NAACP. Rev. O.L. Sealey President, Bro. Frank Rogers, Vice President.

Sat., March 3rd and Sun., March 4th

CHOIR DAY, St. Thomas AME Zion Church, 6:30 p.m. Saturday, 1:30 p.m. on Sunday. All choirs, groups and soloists are invited. Sis. Mary Law, Choir President, Rev. Charles Phillips, Pastor.

Saturday, March 3rd

RELAY FOR LIFE ROADBLOCK, Lisman. All proceeds go to the American Cancer Society.

Sunday, March 4th

ALABAMA NEW SOUTH Coalition of Choctaw County will hold its 2007 meeting at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Yantley, 5 p.m. All members and non-members are invited.

March 7th-10th

MUSICAL CHOIR WORKSHOP, Gooden Hill Missionary Baptist Church, 6 p.m. nightly. The Workshop will climax with a concert on Saturday, March 10 at 6 p.m. The workshop presenter will be Kenneth Braxton, Minister of Music First Missionary Baptist Church, Biloxi, MS. Registration is \$10 for adults and \$5 for youth ages 5-18. For more information contact Essie Landrum (334) 736-4288 or Victor Johnson (205) 398-3037. Rev. Bobby Johnson, Pastor.

Thursday, March 8th

SILENT AUCTION AND GUMBO GATHERING, A Secret Safe Place for Newborns 2nd Annual Fundraiser Auction. Sponsored by District Attorney Spencer B. Walker, Chatom Community Center, 6-8 p.m. Children are welcome. Call 251-847-2070 or 251-275-3144 to reserve tickets. All donations of items for auction will be appreciated and may be dropped off at First United Security Bank in Gilbertown.

Donated items sought for auction to benefit A Secret Safe Place for Newborns

GILBERTOWN — A Secret Safe Place For Newborns is a program that works to prevent the risk of death or injury to newborns (less than 72 hours old).

Newborns may be brought, unharmed, to any designated medical facility within 72 hours of birth for care and placement. The mother will not be prosecuted for abandonment or required to give identification.

According to Amy Duke, President, and Mel Ann Sullivan, Board Member, A Secret Safe Place for Newborns will be holding an auction this year for their 2nd annual fundraiser.

Items are now being accepted and persons, churches, or business may donate to this cause.

All gifts are tax-deductible and donated items can be picked up or dropped off no later than March 8th.

To arrange for pick up/drop off, please call 251-275-

3144 or email firstcircuitda.org. Ask for Amy Duke or leave a message. This fundraiser will be vital in helping the group raise awareness among teens and young adults regarding the service.

All kinds of items are needed: gift certificates to local stores, hunting packages, new furniture, tickets to UA or AU football games, vacation packages, dinners for two, jewelry, items for kids, cell phone service or equipment, free personal tax filing, Easter items, artwork, outdoor décor or services, and other valuable items.

Locally, items may be left at First United Security Bank, 43 Melvin Road, in Gilbertown.

Please mark your calendars for March 8th (6-8 p.m.) and attend this Auction and Gumbo Gathering to be held at the Chatom Community Center. (Children are welcome!)

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