

# Tree planted in memory of Trent Stetler

## Friends, family gather to celebrate one man's impact

Leena Dahal  
Senior Reporter

Standing in front of more than 40 students gathered outside Daniele K, Jim Stetler recalled the day he dropped off his bright and bubbly son Trent as a freshman student three years ago.

"I was bawling my eyes out," he said. Three years later, he said he stands at

the same location bearing a similar, heavy feeling in his heart.

A year after Trent Stetler's sudden death, friends and strangers gathered together outside his freshman year residence hall Saturday morning to share cherished memories and glimpses of their late friend, brother and son.

Together, the community planted a sapling in his name and memory as a

symbol to remind the community of his presence and the memories he left behind.

The Burlington Police reported Stetler's death last January, informing the community that they believed he took his own life.

His mother, Denette Stetler, said the planting is a powerful way to ensure that Trent's memory is not forgotten at Elon.

"One of the challenges of the situation is not letting the loss overshadow what we gained," she said. "When you drive by here in a week, 10 or 20 years later, remember all the late night talks, the laughs and the love."

And they remembered. Through a mix of tears, smiles and laughter, many of his friends shared glimpses of their most cherished memories with him.

There was the time he called up his friend and asked him to reenact a chapter of *Fifty Shades of Grey* for a Big/Little surprise. There were the countless embarrassing but creative nicknames he would make for people close to him, how he'd make people smile with the mantra of *Finding Nemo's* Dory's, "just keep swimming," and how he never failed to share his happy-go-lucky spirit with everyone he encountered.

Loretta Ann Elisson, a custodian at Environmental Services who met Stetler when he would set up for games in Alumni Gym, recalled how he would make her day every time they spoke.

"Trent was a rainbow in the sky," she said.

In a moving display of the profound impact Stetler had on his friends, Jake Battersby, a junior at Elon who was on the rugby team with Stetler, asked the group of students to raise their hand if Stetler had introduced them to at least one other friend.

Without question, countless hands were immediately raised.

"There's never a time when I think of him without a smile on my face," Battersby said.

Logan Drew, an Elon senior and Trent's teammate on the rugby team, said the past year has been "hellish."

"He was one of my best friends, and I never got the chance to tell him that," he said. "But I think he knew."

The event was planned over the summer by senior Nicholas Cianciara and a close group of Stetler's friends as a way to honor Stetler while helping his friends come to terms with the loss.

"I know that I can speak for more people than myself when I say that this has been a tough year," Cianciara wrote on the social media invitation to the community. "I know that many people are still working to find some amount of closure."

Stetler, from Havertown, Pennsylvania, was majoring in economics with a minor in communications. Outside of class, he was a member of Elon's chapter of Alpha Kappa Psi, the professional business fraternity, Elon men's rugby and worked as an intern for the Phoenix Club in the Athletics department.



Trent Stetler's friends and family gather around for the planting of his memorial tree Aug. 29.

# Elon's outreach goes local through health program

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Elon University graduates have traditionally left Alamance County to begin their professional careers. But Elon's new Community Impact Fellows Program, which launched June 2015, looks to develop the Elon-Alamance County partnership for the long term.

"Alamance needs Elon students to stay here," said Catherine Palmer, one of the program's fellows. "When you have graduates staying, they help support local food systems, schools and other things by paying their tax dollars to the county."

Palmer is one of four Elon University Class of 2015 graduates in the thick of their one year of service to Alamance County through the program. She thinks the program's timing couldn't be better.

"It's great being in this program because Alamance County is at an interesting point in its development," Palmer said. "Historically we have been a very conservative

community that hasn't wanted much change, but now we are slowly starting to get a trend of younger people who are pushing for more healthy lifestyles."

The fellows — Palmer, Hannah Allen, Shelby Smith and Maria Restuccia — are witnessing the county's changes post-graduation while working with Healthy Alamance, Alamance Regional Medical Center, Alamance County Health Department and Impact Alamance, respectively.

The program covers their annual salaries and provides housing and health insurance. Additionally, those who enroll in a graduate school in North Carolina or become a full-time employee in Alamance or a neighboring county receive a year-end bonus to encourage fellows to stay nearby.

If the graduates are going to stay close, their contributions as fellows certainly will have played a role.

"The people we're working with are very transparent about how they want us to stay here forever," she said. "They're looking for houses for us and new positions, and they want us to settle in here."

Palmer is at Healthy Alamance, a public nonprofit focused on assessing the health of the community and improving the county's ability to support healthy lifestyles. She's helping the nonprofit with its community health assessment report, developing a new farmer's market in Burlington and data collection.

"It's been great so far," she said. "It's been a nice combination of real community work and outreach that involves moving on the ground and reaching out to people."

Other participants were placed in different sectors across the county.

Allen partnered with Alamance Regional Medical Center, a nonprofit hospital located in Burlington. She has helped ARMC with writing grant proposals and working on community programming at educational events and health fairs.

"There's been a lot of different things to do here," she said. "But it's important because this is a medically underserved county. Hopefully, programs like this will keep increasing at Elon."

Smith is working with the Alamance County Health Department, where she has assisted with strategic planning for the Affordable Care Act, which begins its next open enrollment period in the county in November.

"A key piece for all of us has been really immersing ourselves in this new community and meeting people that are real change-makers," she said. "Now we're figuring out our role in the community and how we can help it."

The four fellows, including Restuccia, who was unavailable for comment, are the first to experience this program and what it will provide for both Alamance County and Elon. Unlike other post-graduate service programs like Peace Corps and AmeriCorps, the Community Impact Fellows Program focuses specifically on progress in the county.

"I think of our Community Impact Fellows Program as a post-graduate, Peace Corp-like experience where recent graduates can practice their skills and knowledge as global citizens right here in our own backyard," said President Leo Lambert during his annual address to faculty and staff in August, according to an E-Net article. "These young alumni are going to play a contributing role in improving health outcomes in our local community."



The Community Impact Fellows, all recent Elon graduates, will assist health-related non-profits in Alamance County.