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# Horse show to aid scholarships in accident victim's name

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## *CONTRIBUTED PHOTO*

Alexandra Hartner, 18, a Hampstead resident, died in a car accident in January. The Alex Hartner Memorial Horse Show will be held Oct. 25-26 at Lake Waccamaw Boys and Girls Home Exhibition Center.

When spectators pour into Lake Waccamaw Boys and Girls Home Exhibition Center for a horse show Oct. 25 and 26, it will be a celebration, memorial and benefit rolled into one. And as Steve Stephens, world-famous jumper course designer, takes the field to honor the life of Alexandra Hartner, no one will be prouder than family and friends she left behind.

"This has been extremely difficult," said Hartner's mother, Jane Cockrell-Hartner, of losing her 18-year-old daughter in a car accident in January. Yet celebrating her memory in a way her daughter would have wanted seems the most fitting way to remember her lively spirit and love of horses.

The two-day event honoring the Hampstead teen includes numerous equestrian events, with all proceeds going to set up two scholarships in her name. In tribute to their classmate and friend, her entire college equestrian team plans to perform at the show.

Hartner, a freshman at St. Andrew's Presbyterian College in Laurinburg and member of its prestigious equestrian team, was an accomplished horsewoman in every show category but took special pleasure in the jumper category, according to her mother. In addition to performing, Hartner loved her role inspiring young equestrians.

Her mother recalled that between each of her events, Alex took time to talk to adoring little girls who followed her around. She encouraged their dreams and made them feel welcome.

"She truly had a fan club," Cockrell-Hartner said.

She said the family has been touched by the many heartfelt letters written by these young fans putting into words how much Alex meant to them.

Riders from pee wee (8 years and younger), short stirrup (9-13 years), long stirrup (14-18 years) to adults will compete in disciplines that include hunter, dressage, gaming and western pleasure. Trophies will be awarded in each division. Activities and games offer entertainment for all ages, as well as a benefit auction, beginning the week before and carrying through the show. A Las Vegas weekend, a Utah ski weekend and a guitar signed by the Eagles are among many valuable items to be auctioned.

"It's been an incredible journey," said George Hartner, the teen's father, on how communities rallied to help. "I'm watching a mother try to come back from a very painful place," he said of his wife. "I'm amazed what she's been able to do."

He said he credits her with leaps of faith like picking up the phone to invite Stephens, who agreed not only to participate, but design the jumper course as well. Stephens designed the stadium jumper course on which America's Olympic equestrian team won a 2008 gold medal. Those familiar with Stephens' work and his equestrian reputation would gladly come to the October show just to see him in person.

All proceeds of the show go toward scholarships in Alex's name at Topsail High School and St. Andrews Presbyterian College. "It was her college fund," her mother said of money they've spent organizing the show, explaining why they want "every dime" dedicated to scholarships.

Alex's younger brother Zeke wanted to give something, too. That turned out to be his prized mint condition Ovation 'Celebrity' guitar.

"I used to do some work with music," her father said. "And I knew Don Henley of the Eagles. So when they came through for the opening of Hard Rock Park in Myrtle Beach, I asked him if they would sign it, and they all did."

George Hartner said responses such as this help them cope. "People are so willing to put their hands out to help," he said.

He added that he's often asked how they can move on from such grief.

"You don't move on," he said simply. "You can only move forward. That's what this show has allowed us to do."

George Hartner said the evening before his daughter was killed, the two of them went to Topsail Island and watched the sunset together, as dolphins swam by in the waning light.

"She asked if I'd buy her a dolphin, and I told her no, I'd buy her two. That's how it was with us," he said. "She was indescribable. No words. It left a major hole in my world. She pounds inside my heart every day."