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School arts program to be renamed for Jaclyn Linetsky

By DAVID LAZARUS, Staff Reporter

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MONTREAL — It was fall, almost 5-1/2 years ago, when Larry Linetsky rushed home to Hampstead to find several Sûreté du Québec squad cars parked outside.

Jaclyn Linetsky

He was told on that day, Sept. 8, 2003, that his beloved 17-year-old daughter, Jaclyn, was dead.

Beautiful, vital, bright and effervescent, Jaclyn was a rising television star. She was also known for being the English-language voice of the popular children's television cartoon character Caillou.

Jaclyn and her co-star in the cartoon series, Vadim Schneider, also 17, were killed on Highway 10 when the van they were riding in, on its way to a shoot of the YTV television series 15/Love that they co-starred in, lost control, crossed the median and slammed into an oncoming vehicle.

Since that devastating day, the Linetsky family – including Linetsky's wife, Terry, and his other children, Derek and Kelly – has continued its struggle to find some sort of meaning or greater purpose out of what has seemed so utterly senseless.

But one way Linetsky said the family will keep Jaclyn's memory alive is through a foundation he launched and a special fundraising evening on April 23, dedicated to Jaclyn's memory and celebrating the fact that the performing arts program at the school she graduated from only months before her death – St. George's School of Montreal – will be renamed the Jaclyn Linetsky Performing Arts Program.

"It's a way to keep her name alive," said Linetsky. "We already give a scholarship every year at the school, but we wanted something with Jaclyn's name on it.

"I looked around at a lot of places to attach Jaclyn's name to, but renaming the performing arts program she was a part of, at the school she went, to seemed a more perfect fit."

Funds raised through the rededication event – called A Night of Stars and being held at the Just for Laughs Museum – will be used for a variety of St. George's drama program endeavours, including as subsidies for students who want to attend the school summer camp.

Linetsky, who heads an organizing committee of about 20 people, has sent out scores of letters to potential participants, ranging from friends and relatives of Jaclyn's to possible corporate sponsors. Support is coming through donations to the school or advertising in a program book being put together for the occasion.

Already confirmed to participate at the event, to be hosted by radio personality Orla Johannes, are singer Sharon Azrieli and CFOX DJ Dean Hagopian. Two of the city's hottest young singers may also perform, providing they're not have other engagements, Linetsky said.

Linetsky said that the event – bitter-sweet as it will inevitably be – will also likely mark a type of

closure to a continuing series of activities he has immersed himself in since Jaclyn's death, in part as a coping mechanism.

About a year after that horrible day, Linetsky went on an already-planned trip almost to the base of Mount Everest, where a "reincarnation Dalai Lama," upon hearing of the tragedy, wrapped a "holy scarf" around a plasticized photograph of Jaclyn Linetsky had brought with him. "I still have it," he said.

That was followed by an excruciating Quebec coroner's inquiry – lobbied for by Linetsky – to establish the facts about the fatal accident. The coroner concluded that the driver of the van lost control because gravel was not placed on the left shoulder to level off a drop-off that had occurred due to the highway being resurfaced. The vehicle lost control after it veered slightly onto the shoulder.

Linetsky said even though the law required that gravel be placed on the shoulder within a few days of resurfacing, it was not done. There was a measure of solace, he said, in the fact that the coroner told the family that Jaclyn in all probability died instantly.

Now, Linetsky said, each family member is still seeking, each day, to come to terms with Jaclyn's death. Some family members, he said, are faring better than others, but "whatever they tell you, it doesn't get easier, it gets harder." Holidays, family events and birthdays are all constant, regular reminders of their loss.

"To this day, we don't talk about it when we're together," Linetsky said. "But you have to decide whether to sink or swim, so I decided to swim."

For tickets to A Night of Stars, call 514-772-0409 or e-mail megz813@hotmail.com or linetsky@vdn.ca.

A link for the event is on the St. George's School website, www.stgeorges.qc.ca, and a site for the event, www.anightofstars.com, is due to be launched, Linetsky said.

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