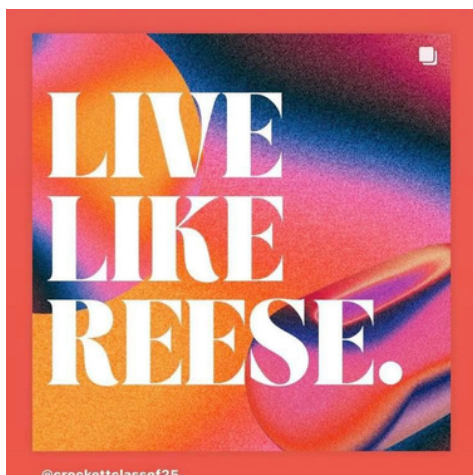


THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF REESE BARKER



By Ron Barry

The next time someone tells you, “What kind of impact do you think you can make? You’re just one person!”, look them straight in the eye and just say a name: Reese Barker.

If they don’t understand what you mean, you might point them to the Bill Emerson Memorial Gymnasium at CCHS Wednesday evening between 4 and 8 p.m., where visitation will be held for the 16-year-old junior who lost her life Saturday in a tragic auto accident on Highway 152. It’s being held at the school gym, says Principal Jerrod Shelton, “because it’s honestly the only place big enough around here to handle the amount of people we anticipate.”

It will be a chance for the community to express its condolences to Reese’s parents, Heather and David Barker, and their family. David is Crockett’s head softball coach, assistant football coach, and driver’s education teacher, and Heather is an educator in Milan. Reese played on the softball team and was a manager for the football squad.



Even before the visitation gathering, the Crockett community is already in motion with a variety of fundraisers for the Barker family. A Go Fund Me account has already reached five figures in donations. Another cooperative effort between the school’s FCCLA (Family, Career & Community Leaders of America), HOSA (Health Occupation Students of America), and Student Council is shooting toward matching that amount, with the special incentive that geometry and pre-calculus teacher Justin Cichello will completely shave off his locally famous five-year-old beard if the \$5,000 level is reached.

Those groups will soon be selling specially designed T-shirts and bracelets, inscribed with the hashtag #LiveLikeReese and featuring illustrations of dinosaurs, which were among Reese’s favorite things. Shirts will also include a couple of Reese’s best-loved Scripture verses: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9), or “When you go through deep waters, I will be with you” (Isaiah 43:2).

All money raised will go directly to the Barker family, as will proceeds from other efforts being led by the football, softball, and other sports teams from the high school. The CCHS Touchdown Club will be selling #LiveLikeReese bracelets at Friday night's home opener against Jackson North Side at Cavalier Stadium.

"I know first-hand how amazing our school is," said Debra Hurst, CCHS chemistry teacher and adviser to the Student Council, who is helping coordinate the fundraising just two years after receiving a flood of love from the community after the sudden death of her husband Danny, an enthusiastic supporter of Crockett sports. "This community always does an amazing job of coming together to help those who experience loss."

While Hurst had not yet had Reese in her high school class - she would have in the spring - she knew Reese from interactions with her own sons in elementary school. "Reese was very involved in everything," Hurst said, "and she had this funny, kind of sarcastic personality, so we hit it off because I thought we were a lot alike."

But let's go back to the opening topic: **impact.**

As soon as the word got around of Reese's passing, tributes started flowing in from all corners of Crockett County. Few will feel her absence more strongly than Misty Garrett, teacher of human studies and adviser to FCCLA. Reese was a national officer in the organization, recently named VP of Individual Development.

Garrett took some time this weekend to construct a tribute bulletin board at the school in Reese's honor, with a montage of photographs surrounding the central message "Life is tough but so are you." She knows Reese's example will continue to motivate her other students.

While admitting she was "stricken with sadness," Garrett expressed one of the most touching statements regarding the situation. "I'm trying to picture her in Jesus' embrace, unbroken and unaffected by what has happened," she said. "I don't mind going through this pain as long as I know she is not." Garrett had mentioned earlier in the week how much more she thinks she gets from her students than she can ever give to them, and Reese was a primary source of that thought.

Impact.

Then, there's school principal Jerrod Shelton. Tasked with leading the school family through the tragedy - "they don't teach this in principal school," he sighed - his words expressed the thoughts of many who were struggling with a proper reaction to the circumstances.

"Sometimes you just don't know what to say. Sometimes you just want to hug and let your embrace express your emotions. I'm so saddened by Saturday," Shelton said. "I want to hug my school and all the students Reese touched. I loved that young lady and love her family. I don't know what else to say but we need each other right now. We need to hug and cry together. After that we will celebrate our beautiful Reese. I want to live like Reese. She loved life and had a beautifully sarcastic way about her - I guess that's what drew me to her."

Again, **impact.**

Impressive as it is to touch your main teacher and school principal in that manner - and realize that they both believe she touched so many others - how about going up the ladder to Crockett County Director of Schools Phillip A. Pratt? Reese stampeded her way into his heart too.

"Saturday, August 12th was one of the saddest days for our school family and for me, one I will never forget," Pratt said. "When thinking about that day and the sadness it brings, I think it is important to share how Reese lived her short but amazing life. After talking with her teammates, club friends, and others, it is evident she was an example of how God wants us to live each day.

"Reese invested herself in other people's lives in a positive way," he continued. "She made them feel special. She took the time to listen, help, and lead by example. Reese was in the family business. Her father David coached both football and softball, and Reese was a valuable part of each program. During her spare time, she helped tutor younger students and wanted to be a light for them when they needed someone to care for or just be there for them.

"Reese impacted more people in her very short but precious 16 years than most do over a course of many years. Our school family will forever be changed because of her. Please pray for our student body, faculty and staff, and the Barker family during this difficult time. Pray specifically for strength, comfort, and peace and ask God to provide all the needs David, Heather, Maggie, and Roman may have in the days ahead."

Colossal impact.

CCHS assistant softball coach Will Rigby shared a poster that Reese had made for one of his class assignments, in which students were supposed to list three of their main wishes. Reese's contribution? 1. World peace. 2. End world hunger. 3. Unlimited pickles!

Humorous impact.

School athletic trainer Carah-Beth Beck worked closely with Reese in her duties with both the softball and football teams. Her description of Reese is succinct but powerful: "The pure joy, grace, and love this girl radiated was like no other!"

Boundless impact.

“While it’s possible to be an outstanding student and thereby impress teachers and administrators, the toughest audience for a teenager is always her peers. Well, Reese won them over too. Consider these words from junior classmate Rachel Jordan.

“These past few weeks, I have been reading the book *Live* by Sadie Robertson with a few friends from church,” Rachel said. “As I read our assigned pages, all I could think about was Reese, and how she spent her time here on earth. Reese was never afraid to truly ‘live.’ Reese loved dinosaurs, football, pickles, softball, and so much more. She was always her true, authentic self.

She was so passionate about helping children with special needs and truly felt that was what God had called her to do. She had a kind, courageous, godly heart. In her book, Sadie says, ‘Truly living is not a matter of what you have, but rather the gratitude and contentment in your heart.’ I believe this aligns perfectly with Reese’s life. Reese couldn’t have cared less about worldly things. She had true gratitude about the life God has blessed her with.

“Please let this be a reminder to be kind. Be kind to your classmates, your teammates, your friends, your enemies. Live life to the complete fullest. We truly do not know when we will take our last breath. I was truly privileged to get to know Reese and witness the **impact** she had.”

There’s that word again: **impact**.

Following Wednesday’s visitation in the gymnasium, the funeral service is scheduled for 1:00 p.m. Thursday at First Baptist Church in Martin. A two-hour visitation period at the church will precede the service.

Reese’s story isn’t truly complete without one final quote from one of her dearest friends – but this one she actually got to hear herself ...

“Well done, good and faithful servant.” – Jesus Christ

Everlasting impact.



Reese Erin Barker:
March 1, 2007–August 12, 2023.