



School community mourns death of junior

w Seth Motel
Editor in Chief

The holiday season is tinged with sadness as students and faculty mourn the unexpected death of Kamila Lemanowicz, an 18-year-old junior from Niles.

According to a press release from the Niles Police Department, Lemanowicz returned to her house and went to sleep on the night of Friday, Dec. 8, after spending time with her boyfriend. Her mother and stepfather were unable to wake her the next morning.

"It's very hard for us," said Tom Umiastowski, Lemanowicz's stepfather.

Her mother and stepfather said that she led life to the fullest. Lemanowicz dreamed of attending college and becoming an Air Force pilot. She was also a skilled horseback rider, artist and animal lover.

The sudden death shook those who were close to her.

"She was my partner in everything," junior Valentina Fonseca said. "She was just a really sweet girl."

Those who knew Lemanowicz said she rarely disparaged others.

"I've never heard her say a bad thing about anybody else," said ESL teacher Leslie Natzke, who taught Lemanowicz.

Senior Oliwia Sarnecki said Lemanowicz was eager to socialize.

"She was always trying to start a conversation. She truly was a nice person," she said.

Lemanowicz became involved in orchestra as a freshman and was the co-chairperson of its food drive this year. In addition, she also spent time in school working in the attendance office as a deans' monitor.

"Whether it was culturally or academically, she could work with [all students]," said ESL teacher Brad Wilson, who had Lemanowicz in class for two years.

In December 2004, Lemanowicz moved to America from Poland, where her father and younger sister still live. She enrolled in Niles West as a freshman, knowing virtually no English. Classmates and teachers said she was a quick learner who didn't let cultural or language differences get in the way of being friendly.

"She had an amazing sense of humor, all the more amazing because she was learning English," said Andrew Jeter, Lemanowicz's homeroom teacher.

Her friends came from all different

groups, and she didn't limit her relationships to those who shared her background.

"Even though we were from different parts of the world, we would still talk," Fonseca said.

Although she had a distinctive appearance and clothing style that set her apart from the mainstream, she didn't let superficial assessments bother her.

"Because of the way she looked and dressed, other people often judged her. As soon as they got to know her, all those stereotypes were smashed," Natzke said.

Fonseca agreed, adding that Lemanowicz didn't take others' comments to heart.

"She was judged, but she never judged anybody. She wouldn't care," Fonseca said.

Orchestra members remembered Lemanowicz as a dedicated and passionate musician. She took up the bass freshman year and had progressed to philharmonic orchestra by junior year.

"She wanted to become a bassist and pursue her bass career. She was always eager to learn," junior Sarah Noll said.

Orchestra director Steven Katz said Lemanowicz always had a smile on her face. He was shocked when he found out about her death.

"It was probably the hardest day of my teaching career," he said.

Katz plans to commission a song in her memory using money



Lemanowicz enjoyed riding her horse in Poland. Photo courtesy Tom Umiastowski

Whooping cough outbreak strikes area Pertussis afflicts nine students

w Seth Motel
Editor in Chief

District 219 administrators are urging students and faculty to take extra health precautions after at least nine Niles West students have contracted whooping cough.

Although many people were immunized against whooping cough (pertussis) as infants, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently recommended that teenagers receive booster shots for the disease. Other than many freshmen who received the shot before high school, few students have been vaccinated with the booster.

School nurse Peggy Bassrawi said that whooping cough can be easily controlled once identified by doctors.

"This is a disease that is far more serious in infants and the elderly than it is in young people because it's treatable with antibiotics," Bassrawi said.

One of the problems in curbing the spread of the disease is the length of time in confirming and communicating a student's infection. Principal Dale Vogler said that one student diagnosed with whooping cough came to school and told his teacher about the affliction rather than staying home. Another student notified the school via an email to a teacher.

"By the time you're diagnosed, you've already been walking around," Vogler said.

She said that the school is now requiring students with whooping cough to receive a doctor's note before re-entering the school.

The school nurses have been sending home students who come in with severe coughs. How does a person know if (s)he has whooping cough rather than a normal cough?

"[People] call it 'whooping cough' because that's exactly what it sounds like, almost like a dog barking," Bassrawi said. "Once you've heard this cough, you'll never forget it."

Despite its rarity, whooping cough is highly contagious, especially in a closed area such as a school. It is also easily spread because its symptoms—runny nose, fever and cough—are similar to those of a common cold, according to an official post on the district's website.

"The nature of pertussis is no different than measles or the common cold or anything else in that the organism passes from one person to another," said Lowell Huckleberry, Skokie's director of health.

In addition to the nine confirmed cases at West and the one confirmed at North, Huckleberry said there are a few others in Skokie. Although the whooping cough outbreak in the area is far from reaching epidemic status, he said, it has been decades since so many cases were reported in the area.

By far, the area school with the most cases has been Winnetka's New Trier High School, which has reported upwards of 30 infected students.

Neither Bassrawi nor Vogler could estimate how many more cases might develop in the school. Since the test for whooping cough is somewhat painful and takes several days to confirm, many doctors have been putting students on the necessary antibiotics if they suspect they have the disease. For this reason, the true number of whooping cough cases may not be known.

The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases reported that pertussis is the only vaccine-preventable disease in the nation that is becoming more prevalent. Pertussis rates dropped from 150 cases per 100,000 people in the early 1940s to one per 100,000 by the 1980s, according to the CDC.

The rates escalated, however, starting in the late 1990s. The CDC reported more than 25,000 confirmed cases of pertussis in 2004, or almost nine per 100,000.

Besides getting the vaccine, the district and local health departments have posted strategies to avoid contracting the disease, the most basic of which include routinely washing one's hands and not sharing drinks with others.

Huckleberry said he could only speculate as to when the local outbreak would die down. The two-week winter break may improve conditions, or it may not be until spring (when people spend less time indoors) when the disease stops spreading. He said the spread is so hard to predict in part because of the relatively unprecedented situation.

Until whooping cough subsides, Bassrawi recommends that students continue to take precautions and have their doctors be in communication with the school if they suspect they have the disease.

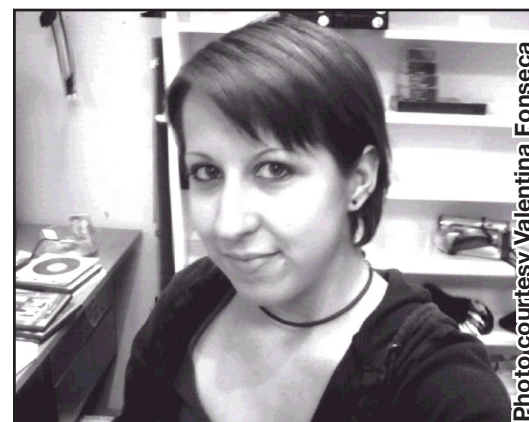
Huckleberry advises people to be aware of whooping cough, but not to be overly concerned by it.

"Don't panic, but absolutely take every precaution to prevent getting it because somebody could have a health problem that probably would aggravate it, and it certainly would affect some people far worse than others," he said.

The district has been updating parents and students about the incidents through its website. Vogler also sent home a general letter to all West students and an extra letter to those in classes with infected students.

The Skokie Health Department will offer the combined tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis vaccine free of charge to Niles West students on certain dates through Jan. 18. The school gave students a packet with the necessary forms this week. Students who wish to take advantage of the service can set up an appointment with the Skokie Health Department at (847) 626-2940.

Those interested in learning more about whooping cough can do so by contacting their doctors or visiting the websites of District 219 (www.niles219.org) and the Cook County Department of Public Health (www.cookcountypublichealth.org).



Lemanowicz

Photo courtesy Valentina Fonseca

from donations made to the orchestra in Lemanowicz's honor. The orchestra dedicated its concert last Sunday to her.

Lemanowicz's friends will not soon forget the impact she had on them.

"She'll always be remembered. [Her death] doesn't feel real," senior Anthony Macias said.

Those who had Lemanowicz as a student also remember her fondly.

"She was truly a pleasure to have in class, for she always came to class with a smile on her face. That is what I'll absolutely miss about her," physical education teacher Tony Konsewicz said.

Wilson said Lemanowicz was able to balance her outgoing personality with her desire to learn.

"We could joke around together while there was learning and teaching taking place," he said.

Above all, those who knew Lemanowicz praised her kind nature. Fonseca said she was a person who would listen to other people's problems regardless of what was going on in her own life.

"She would help you out. She was always there for you," Fonseca said.

Her mother and stepfather remembered her as an empathic individual.

"Everybody was so important for her," said Kamila's mother, Helen Lemanowicz.

Her stepfather said that her affectionate nature set her apart from others.

"She cared about the person as the person," he said.

Lemanowicz's family said she was born with a heart condition and was informed that she died of natural causes. Due to the unexpected nature of her death, the Cook County Medical Examiner's office is performing a toxicology report, the results of which were not available at press time.

Earlier this week, Lemanowicz's remains were flown to Poland for burial.