

College, community mourn fatal Saturday crash that claimed four lives

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
Tuesday, 18 November 2008

HIDDEN VALLEY LAKE — The deaths of four Pacific Union College students in a crash over the weekend has devastated fellow students and led to public tributes in their honor.

Boaz Joshua Pak, 20, and Simon Chulmin Son, 19, both of Hidden Valley Lake; Luke Kotaro Nishikawa, 22, of Honolulu, Hawaii; and Chong Whon Shin, 20, of Aloha, Ore., were killed in a crash that occurred on Deer Park Road east of the Silverado Trail in Napa County at about 11:45 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 15, according to the California Highway Patrol's Napa office.

"The PUC community mourns the loss of four wonderful young men who were already giving service back to the community," said College President Richard Osborn in a statement released Sunday. "Our entire campus is grieving along with their families. But as a faith-based college, we have hope that springs from our beliefs as we celebrate all these young men accomplished in their brief lives."

CHP Officer Jaret Paulson said that while it's early in the investigation, investigators believe speed was a factor.

The college reported Sunday that the students had just finished playing basketball at the college gym and were on their way to Safeway in St. Helena to get something to eat when the crash took place.

Pak was driving a 2003 Honda Civic westbound on Deer Park Road when the crash occurred on one of the last curves heading down toward Silverado Trail, according to Paulson.

"It appears the vehicle lost control and actually slid sideways into opposing traffic," Paulson said.

Pak's Honda collided broadside in the eastbound lane with a 1993 Toyota pickup driven by 28-year-old Sandalio Martinez of Angwin.

Carlos Rio Ortiz, 20, also of Angwin, was traveling eastbound in a 1993 Honda Civic behind Martinez. Following the first collision, Ortiz hit the back of Martinez's pickup.

The four students were declared dead at the scene, according to the CHP.

Martinez sustained major injuries and was transported to Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital for treatment, the CHP reported.

Ortiz, who suffered minor injuries, was booked into the Napa County Jail on suspicion of driving under the influence, Paulson reported.

Paulson added that the CHP also is investigating the possibility that Martinez may have been driving under the influence.

The students, he added, did not appear to have been drinking.

Three of the men were wearing their seat belts, while Shin was not, according to the CHP.

Paulson said the CHP is not saying driving under the influence caused the crash, "but DUI was there." Pak's vehicle suffered "significant" damage, said Paulson. It took emergency personnel a few hours to remove the young men's bodies from the vehicle.

The investigation, evidence collection and scene measurements and cleanup took a long time, said Paulson. "We were there a good nine hours."

While CHP was processing the scene, Deer Park Road was closed and Sanitarium Road was used as a detour around the collision scene.

"It's a tragedy, it's a huge loss to our community," said Paulson. "It's a great reminder to everyone to slow down and buckle up their seat belts."

On Sunday, Pacific Union College — the Angwin-based liberal arts college of 1,400 students that is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church — held a prayer meeting in honor of the four young men, with counselors and pastors available to students afterward.

Pak, Son, Shin and Nishikawa "were well known and liked on campus," the college reported.

The college said that Pak was a biology and pre-pharmacy major, while Nishikawa was studying American history. Shin was involved in youth ministry at the Rohnert Park Korean Seventh-day Adventist Church and studied business administration and pre-dentistry.

Son was involved in a campus outreach program called Homeless Ministries, according to the college statement. On Saturday morning, students said that Son had gone to the Bay Area with a group of students to feed the homeless. He was majoring in nursing.

The college reported that grief counselors, residence hall deans, and the campus chaplain began working with students during Saturday night as news of an accident involving fellow students spread around campus. On Sunday, the college offered support groups and one-on-one counseling for the campus community.

The college's Web site is offering a message board at www.puc.edu/news/memorial for students, friends and family to post their tributes to the students.

Messages have been coming in from around the country and around the world in memory of the young men, with one poster sending condolences from the United Kingdom.

On Thursday at 10 a.m., Pacific Union College will hold a memorial service for the young men during their weekly colloquy in the college church.

E-mail Elizabeth Larson at el Larson@lakeconews.com.

{mos_sb_discuss:2}

