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California | GOOD TURNS

Scott Antolick, who died of heart disease, labored to help others in need. Those he touched are working to keep his example alive.

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Born a "blue baby" with a defective heart, Scott Antolick never achieved his goal of becoming a biomedical engineer who would invent devices to help other people with heart disease.

The 17-year-old from Mar Vista collapsed and died in October while playing Frisbee at Venice High School.

But Antolick had long ago launched himself into a wide range of volunteer work to help people with heart disease and other disadvantages.

Most prominently, he was the youth ambassador for the American Heart Assn. During the last three years, Antolick raised \$15,000 in donations during the organization's West Los Angeles Heart Walks.

His wide range of volunteer work included tutoring children in English and science. Days before he died, he was featured in a Times article about Komputers4Kids, a nonprofit group he and two friends ran to provide donated computers to children in foster care.

For his charitable work, Antolick was given an Outstanding Youth Volunteer Award by the National Assn. of Fundraising Professionals shortly before he died.

Now, moved by memories of Antolick and his spirit of giving, friends and groups in which he was a member have set about keeping his example alive.

The Los Angeles chapter of the American Heart Assn. established the Scott Antolick Outstanding Youth Volunteer Award, which will be given each November to a young person involved in a wide range of volunteer work.

"What he did at his age shows that you can change the world one step at a time," said Dina Bartello, who coordinates the Heart Walks for the American Heart Assn. The award, she said, is meant to "set a standard for other kids."

At Venice High School, the Science Bowl team dedicated this year's competition to Antolick. The band, in which Antolick played trombone, dedicated two upcoming competitions to him. And the golf team is dedicating one of its fundraising tournaments to him.

At Camp Del Corazon -- a free camp on Catalina Island for children with heart disease that Antolick also raised money for -- people have donated \$10,000 in his name, said Lisa Knight, the camp's executive director.

"He was amazing with the work that he did," said Knight. "Even now he continues to support us."

At Mar Vista Elementary School, which Antolick attended, the staff named a shelf in the library after him and planted a tree in the playground that Antolick's parents, Arthur and Penny, can see from their home across the street.

"Our focus was about what he was and will continue to be because of the example he set," said Principal Dolores Palacio. "Even after we are gone, somebody will ask, 'Why is that called Scott's Tree?' And some teacher will be able to explain who Scott was and that will go on having an impact."

Antolick was born with transposition of the great arteries, meaning that his aorta and pulmonary artery were each where the other should be, said his father, Arthur, 52.

The condition prevented oxygenated blood coming from his lungs from reaching the rest of Antolick's body, while blood from the rest of his body that needed to be oxygenated could not get to his lungs.

Through several procedures -- including open-heart surgeries at ages 2, 6 and 13 -- Antolick's heart was corrected to work like a normal heart, but not with the same stamina, his father said.

In his college application essay to Harvard University, Antolick wrote that he felt fortunate that technology invented a few years before his birth allowed him to live. It also inspired him to begin raising money for the American Heart Assn.

"He wanted to give back what had been given to him," said his father. "Had he been born prior to when he did, he would not have survived beyond a year to 2 years of age."

His fundraising started early. At age 10, he raised money for Camp Del Corazon by recruiting donors to the camp's golf tournaments and other fundraisers. When he was 13, he gave the camp 15% of his bar mitzvah money, a few hundred dollars.

Later, as the youth ambassador for the American Heart Assn., he spoke at fundraising events and wrote hundreds of letters requesting pledges for the Heart Walks.

Each September, the letter-writing paid off when he donned a red hat and, with other heart disease and stroke survivors, trekked down a street near the Veterans Affairs offices in West Los Angeles.

Antolick's sudden heart failure was particularly unexpected to friends and family because he lived an active life. Though he was not allowed to play team sports because of the intensity of competition, he grew up playing baseball, soccer, Ultimate Frisbee and golf with friends.

In his college application essay, Antolick explained his life this way:

"Having congenital heart disease is not something one wishes for. All I can say is that my life has been full. If there are things I missed because of my disability, there are many other important and interesting things that I might have missed if I had been born with a normal heart."