

End of watch: Memorial held for slain officer

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ALTON - A crowd of hundreds gathered at **Public School Stadium** adjacent to **West Elementary School** Monday evening to mourn the loss of slain **St. Louis County Police Officer Blake Snyder**, who was 33 years old.

Snyder was killed in the line of duty while responding to a call in the early morning hours of Oct. 6. He was shot almost immediately after responding and was rushed to the hospital in critical condition after his partner returned fire, critically wounding alleged shooter **Trenton Forster**, who has since been charged with Snyder's murder.

Before serving on the **St. Louis County Police Department**, Snyder lived and worked in the River Bend area. He coached soccer at **Alton High School**, where he graduated in 2001. He volunteered in the community and his church, and was described by everyone who knew him as an amazing and loving person. The vigil was created by Snyder's former classmate, **Missy Raley**. Raley said did it because people in a Facebook group of the **Alton Class of 2001** wanted a way to mourn their loss and celebrate their friend's life.

"People were clamoring for a way to do something here in Alton to celebrate Blake ," she said.

Several members of the Alton High School Class of 2001 were at the vigil. **Ryan Durham** said he knew Snyder since the age of 10.

"I knew Blake growing up," he said. "We had a lot of the same classes and played a lot of the same sports as him. On our eighth-grade trip to Washington, D.C., we shared a room together. I wanted to do something and raise money to help his family."

Items celebrating Snyder, such as shirts and window stickers were being sold at the event, with the promise of the money going to Snyder's family. He left behind a wife and a 2-year-old child.



Before candles were lit for the vigil, close friends of Snyder spoke from a podium at the side of the field. His former soccer coach, best friends and fellow officers shared stories about Snyder, illustrating the positive ways his life affected those closest to him.

Snyder's former soccer coach **Greg Nasello** spoke to Snyder's intelligence on and off the field.

"He was one of the best students I ever had," he said. "He was one of the most intelligent people I have ever known."

Nasello said sharing a classroom with Snyder caused him as a teacher to think and ponder constantly. Nasello said it was that quality which made him want to have Snyder as a colleague. After a bit of asking, Snyder agreed to coach soccer with Nasello, despite having an already-packed schedule of community and church service. Nasello said Snyder was dedicated to the coaching position as well, adding that Snyder would stay after practice to help any player who needed additional coaching.

Fellow soccer coach and former best friend, **Jason Porter**, spoke about Snyder's positive effect on the world. He said Snyder's character was so contagious, he received a call from one of their former classmates and soccer teammates following the news of Snyder's death. The man who called was named **Louis Robertson**. He currently resides in Rhode Island, and could not make it to the vigil. Porter shared his story in his absence.

"Blake defended him from bullying on the field," Porter said. "He taught him strength, confidence and that allowed him to play without fear."

After high school, Robertson joined the U.S. Navy for eight years, following what Snyder had taught him, and retaining the values he learned. After leaving the Navy, Robertson again followed Snyder's example and began coaching youth soccer. He said he was able to have a life of positive impact due in part to Snyder's guidance and kindness.

Porter also described Snyder as having an "unmatched purity of heart."



Alton Police Officer P.J. Bennett was also a close friend of Snyder's. Like Robertson, Bennett was a freshman when Snyder was a senior. He joked about receiving wedgies on the bus from Snyder and the other senior soccer players.

Bennett described Snyder as being "a servant to God, a servant to his family and a servant to his community." He said Snyder would have made that ultimate sacrifice he gave in the line of duty again if he was asked to do it.

"We lost a true hero that night," Bennett said. "We have to keep fighting this battle, keep fighting the good fight, keep fighting for what's right and keep fighting for what we stand for. It's what Blake would have wanted."

The candlelight vigil began with the flame of Bennett's candle being passed to each candle across the crowd. A moment of silence and a balloon release followed.