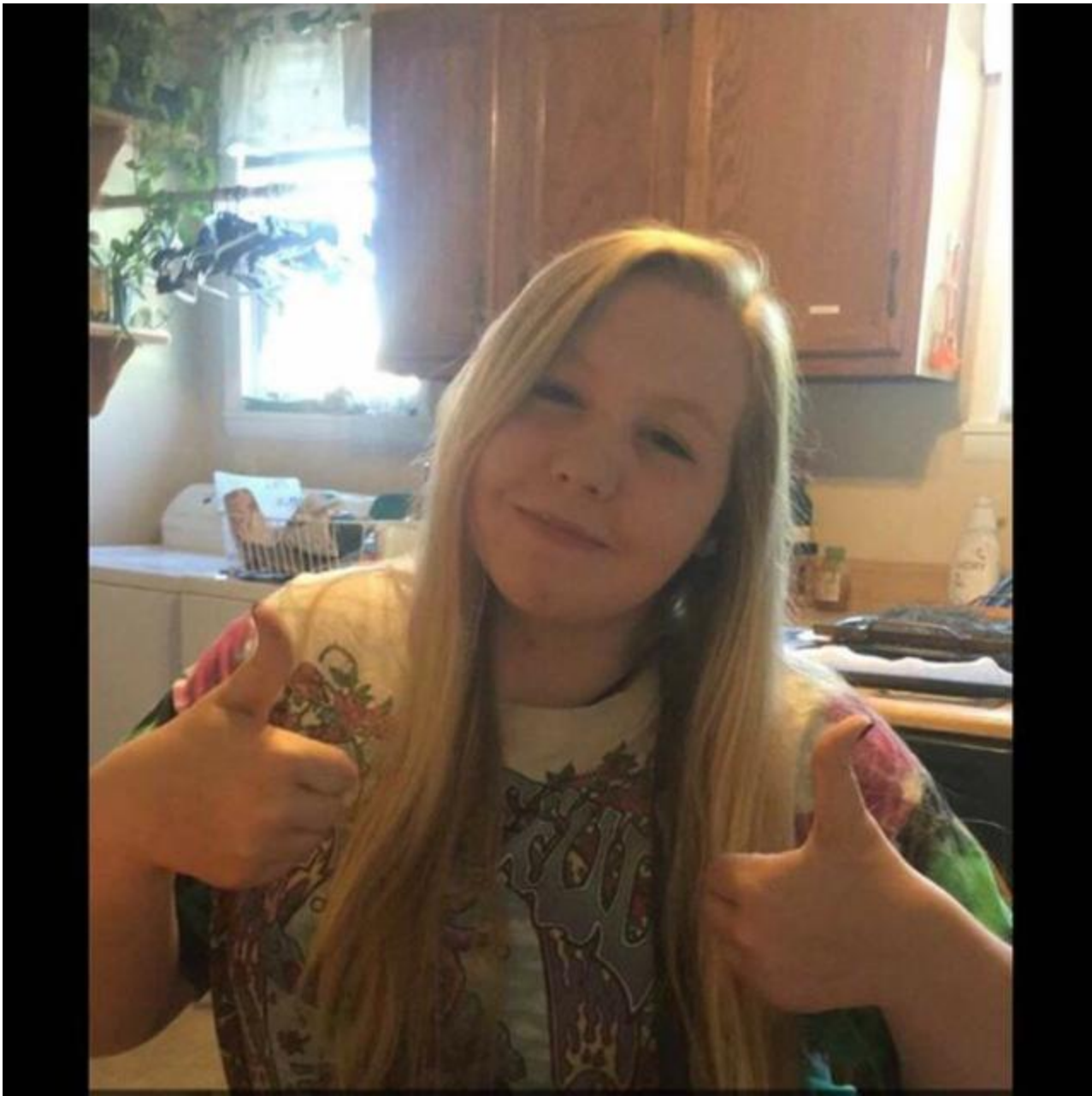




Trinity River Festival: Continuing the legacy of a kind young woman lost too soon

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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COTTAGE HILLS – On Feb. 17, 2018, 17-year-old Trinity Buel was killed in an auto accident leaving her job at Steak N' Shake in Alton while riding in the passenger seat of her own Jeep on Buckmaster Lane.

Following her tragic and untimely death, Buel's mother, April Gray, and Buel's other family members and friends have been working to carry on her legacy. On May 12, 2018, Gray said friends and family of Buel under the umbrella of Trinity's Way, a non-profit starting to continue the dreams of her daughter, will host the Trinity River Festival at the Cottage Hills VFW. The event will feature a dozen bands, an art show, raffles and activities for children.

“We're intending on starting a non-profit for animals and the environment,” Gray said. “It's a collaborative effort between the VFW and Trinity's friends and family. We wanted to put on an event she would come to and enjoy, and she loved going to see live music.”

Buel also enjoyed adopting dogs off the street and returning them to loving homes, Gray said of her daughter. She recounted times Buel would notice a dog looking lost on the side of the road and said her daughter would swoop them and take them to a vet. Often times, the animals were micro-chipped and Buel would be able to take them to their homes. Once, she returned a mother pit bull to her puppies.

“When she brought the dog back, the owners tried to give us one of the puppies, but we have dogs at the house already,” Gray said.

Instead of birthday presents, Gray said Buel would often ask for animal food and blankets to donate to the 5A's animal shelter in Alton. She also wanted to volunteer there since she was 13, but Gray said the non-profit's insurance would not allow her to do so until she was 18. Gray said she wanted to work with her daughter there, but the institution could not allow it due to insurance.

The environment was also important to Buel, who wrote about the great limestone caves in Piasa Park for an online environmental publication. Buel's godfather, Chris Unthank, organized a litter cleanup at that park in which as many as 50 people participated and more than 20 bags of trash were hauled from the caves Buel loved so well.

Those aspects of Buel's personality are driving Gray to push ahead with her daughter's legacy so soon after her passing. When Unthank told her of his plan to forge ahead and convert that tragedy into something productive, she admitted her grief was too much to believe she could. Nearly two months after the tragedy, and Gray admits she still has bad days, but continues to push for Buel.

Gray has had experience in event planning previously, but said the Trinity River Festival is coming fast, but is being put together by a wonderful collaborative effort. Bands from across the area have volunteered their times, including Polyshades, Hookie, Spillie Nelson and headliner, Stubblefield. They will be playing on one of two outdoor stages and one indoor stages.

Vendor and volunteer applications are being accepted at this time through the Trinity Memorial Foundation Facebook page. Sally Kirbach is coordinating the vendors, and can be reached via Facebook Messenger for any questions from potential vendors and volunteers.

During an interview with Riverbender.com Friday morning, Gray said she texted her daughter following an especially bad day and told her she was in a bad mood. When she arrived home, Buel had plucked daffodils from the front yard and arranged them beautifully in a Mason jar on the kitchen table.

When Gray attended a candlelight vigil for her daughter shortly following her death, she said she was too overwhelmed to share that story, but could hear that exact kindness echoed from her friends at the event recounting similar tales of their own.

It was that spirit Gray said she would like to make eternal through Trinity's Way in the future. She plans on hosting three or four events throughout the year and donating money raised to animal and environmental based charities and causes.

More information can be found on the [Trinity Marie Buel Memorial Foundation Facebook page](#), the [Trinity River Festival Facebook page](#) and the [Trinity River Festival event page](#) on Facebook.