

Friends honor teen's memory

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Michael Eidson would have turned 1.5 Monday.

But he missed the celebration by five days. He died last Wednesday at his borne on Barringer Street.

But the memories he left behind were enough to bring more than 50 friends and family members together Monday afternoon to honor him in a manner they saw fitting the circumstances surrounding his death.

While the Sheriff's Office — which initially ruled Eidson's death a suicide — is waiting on a toxicology report before commenting further, Eidson's closest friends and family members said they know how the 14-year-old died during the early morning hours of April 8.

"There's no way," said Joy Hollifield, a friend and fellow student at East Rowan High School, where Eidson was a freshman. "There's no way he could kill himself. Michael used to talk to me about how stupid it was to think about suicide. There is no way Michael could have committed suicide."

Hollifield and many more of Eidson's friends admit that the avid skateboarder had dabbled in drugs. And that, friends say, led to his death on Wednesday.

Andrew Head, a friend of Eidson's who transferred from East Rowan to Salisbury High School, said Eidson died because "he wanted to stay up all night and skate."

"He wanted an upper," Head said. "He wanted to be able to stay up, so he took what he thought was Ritalin. He had taken Ritalin before by prescription."

But Head said the pill Eidson swallowed that night, given to him by a fellow skateboarder, wasn't Ritalin. Instead, he said, it was a commonly used animal tranquilizer.

"I don't know what happened," Head said. "I don't know how it killed him. He just didn't know" what he was taking.

Eidson was suspended from East Rowan High less than two days before his death, allegedly because he "had drugs!" according to Derek Gordon, a friend and eighth-grader at Erwin Middle School.

While Eidson's death didn't occur during school hours, Gordon and other friends say suspending students for drugs isn't the right answer.

"It just gives you more time at home alone," Gordon said. "That's more time to use drugs or get in trouble. I don't think they should have

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suspended him."

Friends also say Eidson, who had used marijuana before, was involved in prescription drugs, not any of the "big" drugs like cocaine, heroin or crack. And that, friends say, made it that much easier to sell, buy, even trade different prescription drugs.

"You could get a prescription drug, and your friends would get a different type," Gordon said. "You could sell it or trade it or buy it. You could get about anything you wanted."

Eidson's father, Ronnie, said he and his wife, Barbara, sought counseling for their son when they first realized he was experimenting with drugs. They acknowledge he was suspended from school last week.

"You don't really realize how far they are into this stuff until it's almost too late," Ronnie Eidson said. "It's a hard pill to swallow when you walk in and find your only child still in the household dead."

Missing the guest of honor at Monday's gathering was painful for those who gathered at the family's yellow-and-green farmhouse. But friends channeled their pain into what they hope will prevent another death in the future.

Friends went beyond the symbolism of burning, in the Eidson's driveway, a fake bong and pictures of a marijuana plant — more than 20 of them signed a statement, vowing never to take, or experiment, with drugs again.

When they presented the framed document to Barbara Eidson, tears flowed. And there was the hope, expressed by Barbara Eidson, that no other mother would have to go

through this type of pain.

"People need to know," she said. "People need to realize what can happen. I don't want any other person to have to go through what we've gone through over the last week."

The toll Eidson's death has taken on his friends was apparent Monday afternoon, apparent in their faces, their words and their actions.

In addition to the signed statement presented to Barbara Eidson, a group of friends also left a skateboard on Eidson's bed last week. Covered with signatures, it serves as a vehicle, a release for the pain Eidson's friends feel.

Take, for example, one of the passages on the board: "I am sorry for ever introducing you

to the drug world. I am sorry that you took the fall for both of our mistakes. As of today, I quit in remembrance of you. I loved you like a little brother, and I always will. Save me a place up there, and I will see 'ya soon. Love you homie..."

The healing process,, said Tina Bartlett, an adult friend of the Eidsons' who organized Monday afternoon's gathering, will surface in many ways. But the healing needs to start — and remain-positive, Bartlett said.

"We want Michael to be remembered for all the good things he did," Bartlett said. "But we want for people to realize what happened here. Good can come out of this. Other people can be educated to the dangers of drugs."

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