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# Scholarship honors Elmhurst teen killed in drunken-driving accident



**Brian Wagner's mother and stepfather -- Barbara Wagner-Lackey, center, and Ed Lackey -- welcome a supporter at the first Bags for Wags fundraiser. The couple serves as directors on the board of the scholarship fund in Brian's honor.**

*Courtesy of the Brian E. Wagner Scholarship Fund*



**Christie Willhite**

The photos (<http://brianewagnerfund.org/upload/upload.form.php>) on a website in Brian E. Wagner's honor show a life lived with enthusiasm.

Posted by friends and family, they show Brian in grade school and high school, with basketball and football teammates, winning awards, performing in Visitation Catholic School plays. He's pictured with his dad, his brother, his mother, his date to the York High School prom.

And then the photos of Brian's life stop suddenly, leaving him as a 16-year-old in 1993.

That summer before his senior year -- on the Fourth of July -- Brian was a passenger in a car involved in a drunken-driving accident and he died from his injuries.

Those who knew Brian -- the castmate, the teammate -- know the leader he was on the field and off. They have no doubt of the success Brian would have found if not for that accident, and they want to help others who remind them of Brian reach their potential.

A group of Brian's friends began work in 2010 to create the Brian E. Wagner Scholarship Fund (<http://brianewagnerfund.org/index.html>) to honor his memory while helping high school students who demonstrate his leadership qualities pay for their first year of college. The scholarship fund will announce the inaugural recipients this spring, said Peter Zamar, president of the scholarship fund.

The second annual Bags for Wags (<http://brianewagnerfund.org/upcoming.html>) bag tournament on Saturday, Feb. 25, raises money for the scholarship fund. Teams of two will play a round robin, then continue into a single-elimination round. The tournament is one of several events that aim to support the scholarship fund, Zamar said.

Today, Zamar tells us more about the group's efforts to remember their friend and encourage teens.

(<http://brianewagnerfund.org/upcoming.html>)

**Q.** What is your organization's mission?

**A.** Encourage high school students to serve as leaders in their community by exercising sound judgment and committing themselves to volunteer programs that make a positive impact in their lives and the lives of others.

**Q.** How do you work toward accomplishing that goal?

**A.** The BEWSF promotes a standard of excellence among high school students by making them aware of Brian E. Wagner's story. Brian was a young man who worked hard at being the best. He had a spirit of determination that shined in everything he pursued. There are many young leaders who have that same spirit; our organization aims to recognize those individuals. We want our emerging leaders to know it is an honor to receive this prestigious award. By applying for our scholarship they can tell us how they've uniquely made a positive impact on others and the community.

**Q.** Who do you serve?

A. Those eligible to receive the award must have graduated from a junior high in Elmhurst or be currently enrolled in an Elmhurst high school.

Q. When and why did the organization start? How has it grown?

A. In early 2010, a group of Visitation alums from the Class of 1990 approached Brian's mother, Barbra Wagner-Lackey, about starting a scholarship fund to commemorate Brian's life in order to leave a legacy in his name. Since then, we have received our 501(c)3 designation, which allows us to operate as a federally registered not-for-profit organization.

The BEWSF committee members are dedicated to contributing their expertise to further the cause. Our core group consists of individuals who share fond memories of the times we spent with Brian. The life he lived continues to touch our lives today. Family, friends, community members and businesses have also played an integral role in building the organization to what it is now.

Q. What kind of successes have you had (include a specific, name-free example if possible)?

A. Many of the Chicago sports teams have taken the opportunity to assist the Brian E. Wagner Scholarship Fund since our inception in 2010. Through their generosity, we have received authentically autographed memorabilia and tickets to home games. We donate these items as raffle prizes at charitable events. During our summer fundraiser in 2011, a Chicago Bulls legend made an appearance to show his support for the BEWSF.

Q. What challenges does the organization currently face?

A. Some of our fundraising ventures are being held for the first time. Therefore, we are taking a chance in starting annual outings. We feel confident our efforts will increase our support base and believe our events will attract community members to attend as participants and volunteers.

Q. What do you wish the community at large knew about the organization? (Or, what would surprise most people if they spent a week with the organization?)

A. Members of our committee spend time actively reaching out to high school students to get them involved in our program. By challenging them to be their best, we know their potential and dedication to make a difference will inspire others to follow in their footsteps. The integrity of our cause motivates young people to make significant contributions to the community and their peers by standing up for what they believe in. The activities the students participate in allows them to demonstrate their personal level of excellence and achievement.

Q. How can readers get involved?

A. We are always happy to accept new volunteers and love to see new people getting involved. Our website offers the opportunity for readers to connect with the BEWSF through the Contact Us section. There they can inform us of the ways they'd like to lend their time and talent. High school students are especially welcome to help, as this award ultimately benefits them. We strongly encourage those who know prospective candidates to apply for our scholarship when the time comes. (<http://brianewagnerfund.org/upcoming.html>)