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‘They told each other they loved each other’

Las Colonias hosts memorial for five teen boys killed in Orchard Mesa crash

By NATHAN DEAL
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The evening of Wednesday, Sept. 9, was a night of mourning and remembrance at Las Colonias Amphitheater, with about 150 people turning out to pay their respects to five teenagers killed in an Orchard Mesa car crash.

Tristan Tucker, William Simms, Tyler Kersey-Huffman, Titus Gould and Braden Taylor, all 17 years old, died in a crash the night of Aug. 8 when their car went off a cliff at Lookout Lane in the Spyglass neighborhood. The high schoolers’ tragic deaths rocked the Grand Valley community.

One member of each family spoke on the Las Colonias stage, reflecting on their lost loved one as the sun set over Colorado National Monument to the west.

BRADEN TAYLOR

Michelle Taylor, Braden’s mother, opened by saying Braden had repeatedly told her he would not live a long life, and that he didn’t want a funeral if he died because people feel obligated to praise someone they didn’t like before.

“He made me and his big brother promise that, if we ever have any kind of service for him, the first thing we would say, verbatim, is ...,” Michelle

said, before Braden’s older brother stepped in and finished the sentence: “He was an asshole.”

Michelle talked about a 4-year-old Braden randomly yelling, “Yeehaw,” when a car ride would get too quiet, and how sleeping next to Braden was like “sleeping next to a drunk octopus” because of how he would flail his limbs about in his sleep. Braden was known for falling asleep in unconventional places like whitewater rafting during a hailstorm or in an all-terrain vehicle (ATV). He once plopped a tube of Go-Gurt on his chest and, unable to eat directly off his chest, he resorted to rubbing his chest on the couch and eating the smeared Go-Gurt off the couch.

Once, when Michelle was having a bad week, an 8-year-old Braden gave her a dollar of his and said, “You’ve been good to me, and I know you don’t make much money.” He bonded with a stray kitten adopted from an animal shelter and was the only person in the family that the cat would come to when called by name. In his teenage years, he became interested in mechanics, seeking out internships at local mechanic shops and taking care of his family’s vehicle maintenance needs.



LARRY ROBINSON/The Daily Sentinel

Alexis Epple, cousin to William Simms, writes a message on a heart-shaped memorial lined up next to similar memorial pieces for Tyler Kersey-Huffman, Braden Taylor, Tristan Tucker and Titus Gould before a memorial service for the teenagers at the Las Colonias Amphitheater on Wednesday, Sept. 9.

“Braden was always jumping in to help people. He’d pull over any time he saw someone broken down beside the road or stuck in the sand. He made friends everywhere he went. Though he wasn’t an active witness himself, he did get to know the worldwide brotherhood that his father and I had known since we were kids, as we were raised as Jehovah’s Witnesses. He was special to congregations locally, in Utah, and in Baja, Mexico, who have been an enormous help to us in the last month,” Michelle said.

“Rest in peace, buddy. We can’t wait to see you again.”

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LARRY ROBINSON/The Daily Sentinel

Grand Junction High School Principal Jory Sorensen speaks to a crowd during a memorial service for teenagers Braden Taylor, Tyler Kersey-Huffman, William Simms, Titus Gould and Tristan Tucker at the Las Colonias Amphitheater on Wednesday, Sept. 9.

Western Slope’s Scheppelman pulls from addiction experience in HHS adviser role

By NATHAN DEAL
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April 9, 2009, was the day Hope Scheppelman finally asked for help fighting an alcohol addiction that had plagued her since her childhood.

Just four days before the 17th anniversary of the start of her sobriety journey, she began working as a senior adviser in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), focused on national addiction recovery efforts.

Scheppelman’s addiction had begun when she was young as a coping mechanism for her father’s severe mental illness and suicidal ideation, as well as the pressure of being the

oldest child in the family. She befriended people who encouraged her to further retreat into her vice. She joined the U.S. Navy as a hospital corpsman, hoping serving would separate her from her demons. Instead, the drinking followed her wherever she went.

“I remember the first day that I took that sip and brought down that whole barrier. It allowed me to not think about what was going on in my family during that time,” Scheppelman said. “I believe addiction is embedded in our DNA. It also is familial, within the family and the genetic breakdown.”

Having herself overcome the stigma of acknowledging and treating one’s

addiction, Scheppelman — now a licensed critical-care nurse practitioner in Bayfield who’s worked with cardiac patients at the Mayo Clinic and has experience treating rural patients — has a say in the federal government’s effort to destigmatize addiction and treat it as a chronic, treatable disease through her role as a senior adviser at the HHS’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Scheppelman landed in the role as the result of a conversation she had in the Oval Office with President Donald Trump in March. At the time, Scheppelman was challenging incumbent U.S. Rep. Jeff Hurd in the 3rd Congressional District Republican primary, and she had scored Trump’s endorsement in the race.

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PHOTO FROM HOPE SCHEPPELMAN

Steven and Hope Scheppelman pose for a photo with President Donald Trump after an Oval Office meeting in March 2026. Scheppelman, at the time a candidate for the U.S. House, dropped out of the race after the meeting and joined the administration as a senior advisor at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.