

Lathrop's Lum family makes plea to Council

LATHROP – The Lum family took their lobbying effort to the Lathrop City Council Tuesday night in the wake of the tragic death of 28-year-old Jeremy Lum a few days ago.

Connie Lum-Perez, an aunt of the University of California, Berkeley philosophy graduate whose body was found floating in the San Joaquin River Sunday, July 11, made an emotional plea to the council members to join the community in effecting changes to prevent similar tragedies from happening in the future.

“I was just asking them to be aware that people in the community have questions about the whole incident – not exactly about the incident but how could this thing happen – and for them to be aware as city leaders that the community is in pain and is suffering. And not just our community but other people as well. This is far-reaching because it could happen to anyone,” said Lum-Perez.

Jeremy, who was bipolar, became the subject of a massive search after he was released from the San Joaquin County Jail. Deputies arrested him for being drunk in public after he was found unconscious on the front lawn of a home not far from his own house. A family member, however, said that Jeremy was probably suffering from a bipolar episode. He did not have his wallet or cell phone and was barefoot when he was picked up by the police and taken to the county jail where he was kept overnight. He was released barefoot and walked away from the county jail at 7 o'clock in the morning Thursday, July 9. That same day, worried family members launched a massive ground and air search for the missing man. Among those who joined the air search was his father, Jerry, who is himself a flyer and a member of an air search unit.

Searchers found the young man's body floating in the river just west of the Sheriff's Office on Sunday, July 12. It was Lum-Perez herself who identified the body.

Family members maintain that he should not have been released from jail when he was ill. A Sheriff's spokesman told the news media that a strong odor of alcohol was detected on his breath when he was arrested.

Even in their grief, the Lum family made a united effort to turn the tragedy into something positive by starting a massive lobbying effort to bring changes in the protocol for those arrested with a bipolar condition by having them listed in a national database.

Showing a picture of her 21-year-old son who is autistic during the council meeting, Perez-Lum said, “I fear for my Geoffrey should he even be out wandering in the dark alone.”

Should the same thing that happened to her late nephew happen to her own son, “please bring him home; don't take him to jail. Please don't let this happen again,” Lum-Perez said.

Speaking before the council after Lum-Perez's tearful speech, former Lathrop mayor Bennie Gatto who has known the Lum family for decades said, “This is a tragedy that should never have happened. This family was reaching out for help and it seemed like they were beating their heads against the wall.”

He added that the Lum family is simply “trying to establish a database that will recognize these types of people that have this type of disease. They are not drunk; they have a mental condition.

“Get behind this family and give all the help you can,” Gatto told the council members.

Reaching out to Lum-Perez and her extended family, Mayor Kristy Sayles said, “My stepdaughter is bipolar so I feel your pain.”

Commenting on the proposal for a national database of people with bipolar disorder, Council member

Robert Oliver said that he thinks there's an easier and more practical alternative to a computerized registry: identity cards, bracelets or necklaces like MedicAlerts carried by persons who have medical issues.

"I think it's far easier (to have these) rather than build a database. I don't mean to pick on the Lums in their time of grief – I know grief. But this is an individual responsibility, and it's more practical" for individuals to carry these cards at all times, Oliver said after the meeting.

During council comments at the end of the council meeting, he stated, "I understand grief. I also have a medical condition."

Because of that, he said, "I carry a card in my wallet at all times (explaining) what my trouble is and what my treatment is."

In an earlier interview with the Manteca Bulletin, Cindy Lum who is also an aunt of Jeremy, expressed the hope that part of the potential changes resulting from this tragedy would involve the education of law enforcement officers in recognizing the symptoms of bipolar disorder. The database, she said, would serve as an identification warehouse for people with mental conditions similar to the one that afflicted Jeremy. There are 2.7 million people in the United States with bipolar disorders, she added, and that the average age when the symptoms to manifest themselves is 25, which was the case for her nephew.

As part of the family's effort to start the national database in Jeremy's memory and get it going, a Jeremy Lum Memorial Fund was established at Delta National Bank in Manteca where people who support the idea can make their donations. The account number for this memorial fund is #22179925.

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