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Tragedy channeled to charity for local businessman

By Jeff Francis

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October 05, 2006

Lakewood businessman Dennis Meyer can't sit still. He glides through the warehouse and showroom of his 50,000-square-foot business, interacting with his 53 employees. In his office, he fidgets in his chair and talks at a pace few could match.

Meyer's edginess might be due to the cancellation of his original plans for Thursday, Sept. 28. He and his wife were slated to speak at a court appearance for the man who killed their daughter in a drunken driving accident in February 2001. The hearing was postponed.

Since their daughter's death, Dennis and Valerie Meyer have started a nonprofit to help other children undergoing the arduous rehabilitation process their daughter experienced. For the Meyers, the Ali Meyer foundation was the natural response to their tragedy, given their philanthropic spirit.

Keeping it local

Although Meyer started Office Liquidators in 1985 in Denver, he moved the new and used office furniture store to 11111 W. Sixth Ave., along furniture row, five years ago.

Meyer said it's the small things that allow his business to thrive in a corporate-dominated field.

"About 70 percent of our business is repeat business," he said. "We offer more of a personal touch. The Office Depots and Office Maxs of the world, you're really buying from a clerk who doesn't understand office furniture. Our people are trained."

With a showcase contract with office-furniture company Hon and shipment contracts throughout the state, Office Liquidators is also the largest supplier of office furniture to the Jefferson County R-1 School District, serving schools such as Columbine High, Fletcher-Miller and Bear Creek High.

Suanne Gallegos, a purchasing agent for Jeffco Schools, said a close location and low bid weren't the only reasons they went with Meyer.

"Recently, he let the schools come in and get \$1,000 of furniture for free," she said. "The other places don't give away furniture. I could call him and say, 'This school needs a couple of filing cabinets,' and he'll provide the filing cabinets."

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Tragedy

On Feb. 10, 2001, the Meyers were returning from a dinner when they saw a truck slam into a little girl, throw her into the air and continue driving.

Valerie "literally screamed out, 'A girl's been hit,'" Dennis said.

When Dennis ran to the scene, he recognized the girl as Ali, their 11-year-old daughter.

Ali was in a coma for 30 days, and in the hospital for 90 more. As she was recovering from body and brain injuries and learning to say "mom" and "hi," she died in her sleep Nov. 22, 2002.

Although the truck sped away after hitting Ali, its front license plate stayed behind. Within minutes police were at the door of Paul McNamara, a former DUI-offender who admitted to having beers before he drove to Safeway.

A Jefferson County District Court sentenced McNamara to two years in county jail, and 10 years of probation.

The Meyers did not approve of the sentence. However, a recent charge of third-degree assault may send McNamara to prison. Meyer said he intends to be at his next appearance, which is scheduled this month.

"I believe that if the punishments were more severe, there would not be as many drunk drivers," Meyer said. "There's too many light sentences, too many plea bargains."

Foundation

During Ali's hospital stays and recovery, Dennis and Valerie became familiar with the Children's Hospital. They spoke with the staff and parents of other patients, who decried the costs of equipment and customized wheelchairs, which can run up to \$6,000 and sometimes are not completely covered by insurance plans.

The Meyers' solution was to begin the Ali Meyer Foundation, which raises money for specialized wheelchairs for children. Based on fundraisers, including two successful golf tournaments, the foundation has contributed roughly \$35,000 to Children's Hospital.

"We did this foundation because Children's was so good to us," he said. "We learned that insurance doesn't cover everything.

"We want to help out these other parents, and we knew it was a good idea to do this in the name of Ali," he said.

Jeff Francis is the Lakewood community editor. He can be reached at 303-279-5541, ext. 238.

Who is Dennis Meyer?

Age: 51

Family: Wife, Valerie; Son, Greg and daughter, Ali, who passed away.

Profession: President and founder of Office Liquidators.

Interesting fact: Dennis was a special education teacher in the 1980s.

Web site: www.alimeyer.org

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
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