

Gavin Russell

and the gift of life

As the Russell family, along with the Chaminade community by their side, continue to grieve the sudden and untimely passing of Gavin Russell '25, one could find it nearly impossible to think any good might come from this tragedy. The loss felt by his family is both unimaginable and ongoing. He was by all accounts an outstanding young man, adored by his family, his teachers, and his classmates. In what was described as a frenzied series of events occurring within the span of only a few hours, his family was notified that because of an inoperable brain tumor (discovered only hours earlier), he was to be put on life support with no hope of recovery.

When approached by staff at Cohen's Children's Hospital about the possibility of donating Gavin's organs, the Russell family, in an immediate act of tremendous generosity, agreed. Bill Russell, Gavin's father, said, "My wife Cindy and our daughter Claire answered almost instantaneously and in unison, a resounding 'yes.' It was an easy decision during a grueling time. We all knew that's exactly what Gavin would have

wanted." They were immediately connected with LiveOnNY to begin the process.

Gavin's organs would eventually save the lives of five people. One of those recipients was none other than Mr. Robert Evans, Chaminade's band director. When he joined the US Navy in 1967, Bob was

waitlist, a process that could realistically take approximately seven years. Moreover, he ran the realistic risk of "aging" out before a kidney was ultimately found.

When the faculty was informed of Gavin's condition, Bob inquired through President Bro. Thomas Cleary, S.M. '81,

if Gavin's family would be willing to donate his kidneys in Bob's name. In doing so, his name would be elevated on the transplant list. Bob was Gavin's private baritone horn teacher and his director in the Flyers Band. Again, in what was described as an easy decision, the Russell family immediately agreed. Initially, they did



not believe Bob would be a match with Gavin because they were different blood types, but in a very rapid series of events, Bob was told that he would actually receive one of Gavin's kidneys. Within 12 hours, he was prepped for the procedure, which would occur the next day at North Shore University Hospital. Even though the surgery, performed by Dr. Ahmed Ezz Eldin Fahmy, MD, was a success, his recovery would take months, and Bob has only

informed at his first physical that he only had one functioning kidney. This revelation did not really have much of an effect on him until about four years ago, when he was told that his one working kidney was beginning to fail. In February of this year, the kidney function was down to a mere 18%, and Bob was days away from having to start daily dialysis, a process that would require treatment for up to four hours each day. He was also put on the transplant

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recently been able to return to work at Chaminade. Through his tears, he expressed both profound grief and gratitude for his "little man," as he had nicknamed him earlier in the year.

Although Gavin only lived a short time on this earth, he seemed to make an impact on every life he touched. At McKenna Elementary School, he was the graduation recipient of their 3C Award for demonstrating the characteristics of courage, character, and commitment. Although he was an outstanding student from an academic standpoint, Gavin's father said, "My son had the kindest soul; he was inclusive, naturally empathetic, and compassionate to all those around him. He was wise beyond his years and so very curious about the world around him. Parents would often approach us in the stands at baseball games or at Boy Scout functions, and ask what we did to raise him so well. That's just who Gavin was."

Mr. Russell also noted that the decision to attend Chaminade was entirely made by Gavin. At Chaminade, he would also make an immediate impact

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GAVIN WILLIAM RUSSELL

Beloved son, brother and friend

His legacy lives on in those he saved through the gift of organ donation.

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on all those around him. His teachers poured accolades on his memory. He performed superbly in the classroom and continued to develop his love of music, especially the Beatles and jazz greats like John Coltrane. Bro. Stephen Balletta, S.M. '76, had the good fortune to serve as Gavin's Speech and Debate moderator. He said, "No freshman practiced more than Gavin. He would report to Room 101 several afternoons a week, be assigned a current-events extemporaneous topic by either me or one of the upperclassmen on the team, and then go to work preparing his seven-minute speech. An 'extemper' has only 30 minutes to prepare, but Gavin was always laser-focused and determined to use his prep time wisely. He gave excellent

extemp speeches - the kind you would expect more from an experienced speaker rather than a novice. All the upperclassmen on the team loved Gavin and took him under their wing. Gavin was a fighter - a bright, determined, highly motivated young man. That's why I called him, alternately, 'Tiger' and 'Champ.'"

Today, Bill, Cindy, and Claire, are doing about "as well as possible" but are still suffering the shock from this enormous loss. They have joined a bereavement group and are tremendous advocates of organ donation. We at Chaminade are confident that from his place in Heaven, Gavin is smiling that his organs have given a new lease on life to others, especially his band director.

