3rd Annual Hannah Duffy Memorial Scholarship –

On behalf of our family and the Hannah Duffy Foundation, we are extremely proud and honored to present the 3rd annual Hannah Duffy Memorial Scholarships, each in the amount of $5,000.

I think everyone in this auditorium knows about Hannah, but for those that may not, Hannah was our daughter and she passed away from brain cancer on Sept 26th, 2013 at the age of 14, following a year-long battle with the disease. If I’m being honest, I have been both looking forward to and dreading this night for almost 4 years. While we are blessed to be able to pay it forward through this scholarship program, it also breaks our hearts too… Hannah should be sitting here tonight, with her peers, enjoying the last days of high school before heading off to college in the fall.

Hannah was an amazing young woman…she was funny, wicked smart, a talented athlete, a fiercely loyal friend and the best big sister to her beloved little brother Robbie. Hannah never let cancer define her, and was determined to live her best life, for however long that may have been. Her spontaneous nature, kind soul and contagious laugh are what are missed most.  Her spirit and her positive attitude in the worst of times have brought out the best in so many people. For someone so young, she has left an incredible mark on this community and beyond, and has shown us all what it truly means to "live life to the fullest" and to be grateful for every day.

The Hannah Duffy Foundation allows us to continue Hannah’s legacy in a positive way.  It is very important to us to “pay it forward”, and we are honored to be able to do that through this Memorial Scholarship program.  The selection process is performed by an independent committee, so neither John nor I were privy to the applications prior to selection.

In developing the scholarship program in Hannah’s memory, our hope was to find students who embodied the spirit and essence of our Hannah...most importantly, integrity, kindness & compassion. During the recent dedication ceremony of an angel playground similar to Hannah’s here in Tinton Falls, the founder of the Where Angels Play Foundation, Bill Lavin, a dear friend of ours said something recently that really resonated with me, he said, “You can have all the compassion in the world, but if you don’t act, it means nothing.” We must be the change we wish to see in the world, and we need to start by being compassionate to others in every aspect of our lives.

Our Hannah is an incredibly strong spirit, she’s always with us in everything we do, and this year’s scholarship selections were no exception. The scholarship applications are all numbered, names removed, so the committee members were only aware of the numbers applied to each of the applications when doing their review. Recently, the committee meeting was held to review the applications and make the final selections. When the scores were tallied, we were astounded and stunned speechless when we realized that the winning applications were #3 and #18, in that order. Not only is #3 Hannah’s soccer number, but 3/18 is also her birthday.

So, there is not a shadow of a doubt that Hannah not only approves of this year’s recipients, she hand-selected them herself.

These students truly embody the spirit of our Hannah, and our hope is that you carry on throughout your life with the dedication you have shown during your high school years.

Our first award winner is an incredible young woman, and before I introduce her, I’d like to share some of her own words …”It has been said, time heals all wounds, but I disagree. I believe that we never truly get over great loss. Instead, we take it in to become who we are destined to be. When faced with Hannah’s death, I was forced to make a choice. Would I allow a piece of me to die with her, or would I adopt a piece of her to live within me?”

Incredible and profound, this truly touched my soul. And, with that, it is our honor and privilege to award our 1st scholarship of the evening to Caroline Collins.

Our second award winner is someone we’ve known for many years, and have watched him grow into an incredible young man. One of his great loves is baseball, and I also had an opportunity to read his essays after the selection process was complete. Our Hannah was an incredible athlete, and for her, soccer was her passion, so reading his words about the true meaning of the game following his last season of travel baseball also resonated with me. He said, “I left that program not the best, not the fastest or the most-talented. I left that team a leader in the mold of the guys I had looked up to, and that solidified my mindset to do right by others, and it is the mantle that I’m proud to wear every day.” So, once again, it is our privilege and honor to award our 2nd scholarship of the evening to Mark Abrams.

At this time, we are proud to announce a special surprise. As I mentioned, Hannah’s passion was soccer, and her number was #3. And, through the generosity of this community and beyond, we are thrilled to be able to award a 3rd scholarship in the amount of $5,000 to a very deserving student. You are all Hannah’s peers, her graduating class, and what better way to honor her in what would have been her senior year than to offer 3 scholarships.

This 3rd scholarship is being awarded to a young woman who exhibits not only academic excellence but embodies what is most important in this life…kindness and compassion. I loved that she wrote, “Being Kind is something to always do…and not just when I felt like it.” That shows true character, and is one of the traits so important to us. It is our honor and privilege to award this scholarship to Rachel Lindeman.

I’d like to congratulate all of the scholarship winners tonight, and our hope is that each and every one in attendance here tonight chooses, in the words of Caroline, to “adopt a piece of Hannah to live within them”. Our daughter was a beautiful ray of sunshine, missed more than words can ever express but her soul lives on.

Hannah taught us all so much… most importantly, "Cancer never wins...only Love does, over and over again."

I’ll close with the words I said on the night Hannah died... “Live with No Regrets, Love with Compassion, Be Kind, and Never Ever Give Up that Fighting Spirit.”