

Alfred University faculty, students mourn Benjamin Klein

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ALFRED To his friends, he was affable and witty, caring and compassionate, always quick with a joke and willing to help others. To his teachers, he was a promising business student and accomplished musician who in his three years at Alfred University developed into a leader among his peers. That's the way Benjamin Klein, 21, an economics major from Putney, VT, will be remembered when the Alfred University community holds a memorial service at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 26, at the Seventh Day Baptist/Union University Church on Church Street in Alfred. "The service will be a celebration of the life of Ben Klein as well as a time of prayer for the healing of the Alfred University community, which has been so affected by the tragedy of Ben's death," said the Rev. Laurie DeMott, interfaith advisor for Alfred University, who is coordinating the service. She has invited faculty and students to share their memories of Klein during the service. The University Chamber Singers and the orchestra will provide music for the service in honor of Klein, who was a member of both musical groups. Klein, a 21-year-old economics major from Putney, VT, died sometime between the evening of Saturday, Feb. 9, and the morning of Tuesday, Feb. 12, when his body was found in the creek behind Zeta Beta Tau fraternity where he lived. Dr. James Booker, associate professor of economics and environmental studies, taught the Economic Principles class, an introductory course in economics that Klein took as a freshman. What most impressed Booker was that Klein was "always questioning and inquiring," never taking his instruction for granted. "He was curious," Booker said. "He always wanted to know more; to explore all possibilities." Klein was particularly interested in the environment and had enrolled this semester in Booker's senior research seminar class entitled "Material World: Exploiting the Earth." Professors who knew Klein well spoke of his interest in business and the environment, and his desire to explore ways that business endeavors could be pursued in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. "That's what Ben wanted to do," Booker said. "He didn't see it as contradictory, like many do, but as a challenge to be embraced. He saw it as very realistic." Dr. Abderrahman Robana, professor of finance, advised Klein two years ago in an independent study project on socially responsible investing. "It opened his eyes to that part of the business world," Robana said. Dr. Sandra Singer, associate professor of German who had Klein in five of her classes, said she spoke with Klein's mother, Susan, who related her son's one-time ambition of becoming a farmer. While that desire soon faded, Klein's love for the nature and the outdoors grew stronger. "He went into business because he felt the best way for him to help in protecting the environment was to do it from inside the business community," she said. "Rather than simply criticize business (for being harmful to the environment), he wanted to do something about it." One of Klein's passions was music. He was a member of the University's Chamber Orchestra and Chamber Choir since his freshman year and eventually blossomed into one of most reliable members of both groups. Dr. Luanne Clarke, associate professor of voice and chorus and director of the Chamber Singers, recalls how Klein became more self-assured as his time with the group passed. "I knew he had the ability to perform solo, but he never really had the confidence," Clarke said. That changed when Klein was notified last fall that he was being nominated for a music scholarship, which he was eventually awarded. "He blossomed after being nominated for the scholarship," Lantz said. "It really made his confidence grow." Klein, a baritone, began volunteering to give solo performances for the Chamber Singers. His last solo performance, the weekend before his death, came during the group's annual Italian Dinner event. Lantz placed him at the front of the Chamber Orchestra, not because he was demonstrative or boisterous, but "because he was confident and the others followed his lead." Clarke and Lantz recall how Klein took on leadership roles with the groups. "He embraced any type of music I handed out for the Chamber Singers," Clarke said, noting that his enthusiasm and receptiveness rubbed off on others. Lantz said that during Klein's freshman year, he was at the forefront of efforts by the Chamber Orchestra members to expand to a full symphony orchestra. "He asked why we couldn't have a full symphony," Lantz said. "I told him we needed more people. He was part of a group that went out and recruited new members and by his sophomore year we had a symphony orchestra." Klein was active in the AU Student Managed Investment Fund (SMIF), in which a group of students, under faculty advisement, manage a stock portfolio initiated five years ago with a \$100,000 investment by the University's Board of Trustees. Robana and professor of law Dr. Robert Hutter, advisors to SMIF, say Klein's leadership was key to the continued success of the program. The AU SMIF executive committee traveled to the University of Dayton, to compete as one of 15 finalists nationwide in the Student Investment Strategy Symposium. Hutter came away impressed with Klein's presentation of the Alfred portfolio to judges. "Ben was the heart and soul of the group," Hutter said. "He was the most sophisticated

when it came to understanding investments and made a majority of the group's presentations."Robana credits Klein in large part for minimizing the hit the SMIF portfolio took when the stock market began falling about a year ago. "He was essential to keeping our losses as low as they were," Hutter noted, adding that Klein was never one to agree to a SMIF portfolio transaction without exploring all options."He didn't take a passive approach to learning," Hutter added. "He wanted to debate the merits of buying or selling a stock. A lot of students from time to time would look at a stock price and say, 'Let's sell it. It's not doing anything.'" But Ben would want to take a closer look, study it and do more research. Usually, if he proposed something, others agreed. He was the most respected of anyone on SMIF in terms of his knowledge of investments."Mike Novak, a junior business major from Orchard Park joined SMIF this year and recognized Klein as a leader who was quick to offer a helping hand to others in the group."Ben was a real nice guy. He was very knowledgeable in finance and was always helpful," Novak said. "In a group like SMIF, there is professor involvement, but for the most part you learn from others in the group. I learned a lot from Ben."Singer said that at times he struggled with his German classes, but was determined to succeed. He stopped taking the classes after last semester to concentrate on business studies, but had planned to take them again during his senior year. "Most kids would have just given up," Singer said. "But he stuck with it for five semesters." Like others who knew Klein, Singer remembers him for his sense of humor, his various interests and love for life, and the effect he had on those around him. "People all liked Ben. Everyone is going to miss him a lot his sense of humor, his outspokenness," Singer said. "I remember the last time I saw him (earlier this semester). He was walking through campus and he looked so relaxed and happy. He told me about the wonderful (semester) break he'd just had. He loved to go back to Vermont and ski and he'd just spent the break as a ski instructor."Erica Hesselbach, a junior astrophysics major from Newfane, VT, knew Klein since the time both were in fifth grade. While they attended different schools, both belonged to the same church - St. Michael Episcopal Church in Brattleboro - where they met and became friends. She recalls Klein as being very passionate about his interests and one who held firm to his beliefs."I always joked with Ben that he should be in a debate club," Hesselbach said. "He had his opinions but always had firm arguments to back them up."Hesselbach, who last fall joined the University's Chamber Singers, has vivid memories of Klein performing in church when they were growing up in Vermont."Ben was one of the 'children of the choir,'" she said, referring to the small group of youngsters who were children of adult choir members. Klein and others occasionally sang with the choir, or played instruments for the congregation."Ben was a joker. He liked to make people laugh," said Tiffany McCaffery, associate director of alumni and community relations at Alfred and manager of the University Phonathon, for which Klein was a student caller since the beginning of his sophomore year. "He was just a happy-go-lucky, endearing guy."McCaffery recalls times when Klein would call an alumnus and soon be engaging in discussions about politics or business. "He was very intelligent and interacted well with others."Ryan Chavoustie, a freshman business major from Baldwinsville, said he began working as a caller for the Phonathon last fall and immediately struck up a friendship with Klein. "We really hit it off, partly because we were the only two guys in the (Phonathon) house. Plus we liked the same kind of music," Chavoustie said. "He had a real sense of humor that lightened up the atmosphere and made it easier to call (alumni). He was a very dynamic person. He had his academics, his music, his friends, and he enjoyed them all."Chavoustie hopes to create a memorial, perhaps a photograph of Klein with messages from his co-workers, to be placed permanently in the Phonathon house, "just so he's not forgotten." In addition to performing at Klein's memorial service, the Chamber Singers and Chamber Orchestra each will dedicate concerts in April to Klein's memory. Clarke noted that Klein's family has spoken about setting up a memorial scholarship in his name. Booker, who will speak at the memorial service, had looked forward to working with Klein this semester, especially after having just returned from a year-long sabbatical."It was devastating to me," Booker said of Klein's death. "This was going to be the spring I'd get to know him well. From what I knew of him as a freshman, Ben was a student with tremendous promise and potential who was already questioning the world around him, the way you'd want an Alfred student to do."