

Christian Heritage Founder Killed in Hit and Run Incident

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Gerry Baksys and April D. Refior / VOICE News

Authorities are looking for the person who hit and killed Gregg Nicklas with their vehicle late Thursday, May 29.

According to the Lancaster County Sheriff's office, Nicklas, 62, had left his home on Wagon Train Road in Hickman at approximately 10 p.m. to let his dog out to go to the bathroom. Capt Ben Houchin said he was hit sometime between 10 p.m. and when he was found by his wife, Lisa, at approximately 11:30 p.m.

"His wife couldn't locate him, but saw the dog," Houchin said. "She went looking for him."

The sheriff's office reported Lisa found Gregg in the east ditch along the road, suffering significant injuries. The Lancaster County Sheriff's office, Nebraska State Patrol, Hickman Fire and Rescue, Lincoln Fire and Rescue and StarCare responded.

Life-saving measures were attempted, but Nicklas was pronounced dead at the scene of the accident.

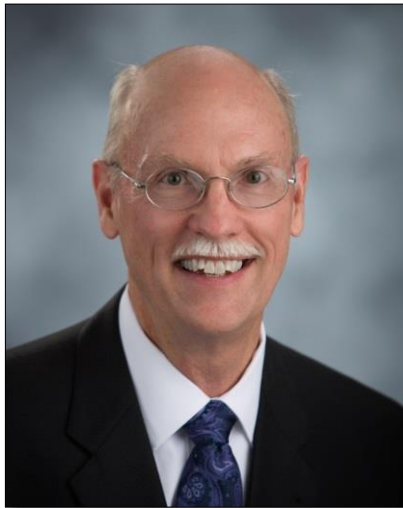
According to Lancaster County Sheriff Terry Wagner, information was received on Saturday, May 31, that the vehicle involved in the hit and run crash was located at 204 W. 4th in Panama. "Contact was made with the registered owner, 33-year-old James Gibbs," said Wagner. "The 2002 GMC pickup had damage consistent with the debris investigators had recovered from the crash site. The vehicle was towed from Panama, and a search warrant has been obtained to search the vehicle. Investigators are still working to determine who was driving the vehicle at the time of the crash."

The beginning of Christian Heritage

Gregg was born in Curtis, but moved with his family to Lincoln at a young age. He met Lisa while

they were both students at Lincoln Southeast High School. Gregg and Lisa moved from central Nebraska to Hickman in 1980.

Besides raising a family of their own, Gregg and Lisa helped thousands of children find families through the foundation of Christian Heritage in Walton, an organization they founded in 1981. They served seven foster children in their home between 1980 and 1981.



Brad Brown, the program director at Christian Heritage and a friend of Gregg, said the tragedy has struck him deeply.

"I am deeply saddened by the news of Gregg's unexpected death," Brown said. "Gregg was more than a boss, he was my friend. Gregg was a devoted husband and father of five children. He was passionate in his work to see families restored, children filled with hope and prepared for life. Gregg will be greatly missed and his legacy to serve children and

families will live on as a testimony of his faithfulness to God's call on his life."

Brown said he and Gregg shared many common values, including their Christian faith.

"Gregg loved to celebrate life," Brown said. "He did that with family, friends and food. Any time there was a reason to celebrate anything, he would celebrate it. Life was about celebrating for him."

About the man

"My dad is gone - he is in heaven with our Lord and Savior and his pain is gone," said Gregg's son, Jon Nicklas. "Our pain has just begun, and although there are no words to describe how our family feels, we know there is a bigger plan and we cling to that hope."

According to his family, Gregg was a gifted communicator. "He couldn't walk through a grocery store without making new friends," said Jon. "He would tell a complete stranger things I wouldn't reveal to my closest friends! His writing was spectacular. He crafted and pored over his letters, stories, newsletters, grant requests, proposals, even the family Christmas newsletter. When you got a letter from Gregg, it was powerful."

Gregg loved campers, his family said. He spent hours researching them, visiting dealerships to see them. The Nicklas family spent a lot of time together in campers throughout Gregg's life.

"We started in tents (don't set up your tent in a valley) and worked our way up to pop-ups, travel trailers and even a diesel pusher," Jon recalled. "As the family grew and grew, the camping trips changed into mom and dad travelling to their favorite spots - Estes Park Colorado was a favorite."

As the family was looking through old photographs for a slideshow, it was evident how much Gregg loved cars as well, be it Lincoln Continentals, Mustangs, Corvettes, a suburban or a Tahoe and of course Hondas. His family said his car was rarely dirty and, when it was, he would find the nearest car wash or garden hose. "One of our family's best memories was how Gregg parked," said Jon. "It was as far back in the parking lot as possible to avoid door dings. Great exercise, but a long way away from the door of the restaurant, store or shop where we were."

Gregg also loved people and was a gifted philanthropist. "His ministry was his passion," added Jon. "He travelled the country to speak with others about his heart for children and the ministry he and mom started. I had the privilege of working with him for five years, and his vision was astounding. He was aggressive and attacked the ideas he felt were important. The number of children whose lives have been touched by his life's work at Christian Heritage we may never know."

"Ready, fire, aim." That was the most famous Gregg saying. "He would often embarrass everyone with him because he would say things without any hesitation, like asking a stranger how

far along they were...come to find out they weren't pregnant!" Jon said. "Most people would shrink away in total humiliation, but dad would laugh and continue the conversation as if nothing awkward had occurred."

He was a man of faith, his family said. He was quick to pray with anyone who needed it, no matter the time or place. His life was the story of his faith. "He took risks others would not in order to follow this belief," said Jon. "I remember going with him to churches across Nebraska to speak on many a Sunday morning about his faith and his ministry."

Gregg leaves behind his wife Lisa; their children: Jon (Erin) Nicklas, Jami (Brandon) Harms, Jeff (Michelle) Nicklas, Jennifer Nicklas and Joy (Stetson) Fuller; and their nine grandchildren: Grace, Micah and Hayden Nicklas, Jaelynn, Connor, Izabella and Harper Harms. and Chase and Cole Nicklas. Other family members include brothers Steve, Dave, and Brad and their families. Gregg has been reunited with his parents Glenn and Anna Nicklas and his aunt Helen Schneider.

A graveside service was held on June 5, at the Elmwood City Cemetery, followed by a Celebration of Life at Lincoln Berean Church. In lieu of flowers, memorials can be sent to Christian Heritage.

"Dad, we will miss you," said Gregg's children, Jon, Jami, Jeff, Jenni and Joy. "You touched a great many peoples' lives and your impact will be missed. We will miss your hugs and your impeccably written text messages. We will miss your love for life. We will miss your leadership, but we know we will see you again one day."

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