



# Ankeny students hail late classmate via Twitter

Heavy hearts are fueling fast thumbs in Ankeny.

Students are using their phones to grieve over the death of a classmate by posting messages on Twitter in a quest to celebrate Dyamond Ott's life.

Tweets about the 18-year-old Ott's passing began shortly after she died from cancer on Sunday. Late Wednesday following a candlelight vigil in her honor, students began a campaign to make her a trending topic on Twitter by posting #diamondslastforever.

"This has brought our school so much closer together," said Maggie Denning, an Ankeny High School senior. "I walked around school today, and everyone is just so upbeat and happy. Everyone has been sad these last few days because of Dyamond — now there's a whole different outlook on it."

Family friend Cody Chapman, an Ankeny junior, came up with the #diamondslastforever trending topic on Twitter, a social media site. Trending topics are popular phrases on the site and are highlighted for a limited time in a continuous list of breaking news items.

Ankeny students reached their goal Wednesday and then spent Thursday trying to do it again.

"Everybody thought it was a pretty cool to think Ankeny could do something like that," said Chapman, 17.

Several students tried to get singer Justin Bieber to retweet it to his followers because Ott was a fan. Olympic gold medalist Shawn Johnson retweeted a request to keep Ott's memory going. So did football player Tyler Sash, a rookie safety for the New York Giants and former University of Iowa safety.

Even students from Southeast Polk — one of Ankeny's biggest rivals — showed support: "In the end, it doesn't matter what school you go to whether it be Ankeny or SEP. When times are tough, we are one."

Denning was in awe of Ott's ability to inspire even after death.

"Ankeny High School is just a better place because of what she's shown us — not to t

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ake things for granted,” Denning, 17, said.

Diane Ott, Dyamond’s mother, has never been on Twitter, but she said the outpouring of support for her daughter has left her speechless.

“I thought it was incredible,” Diane Ott said. “Everybody was texting me (Wednesday) night just telling me how it was going wild.”

Dyamond Ott had a liver and kidney transplant when she was 13. She worked with tutors for two years to stay at grade level so she could graduate with her classmates last year, Diane Ott said. In January, Dyamond was diagnosed with a brain tumor, for which she was treated with radiation and surgery. In November, doctors discovered she had developed cancer in her abdomen from the transplant. She was being treated in Omaha when her heart stopped. Doctors tried for an hour to bring her back.

“Her little heart was done,” Diane Ott said. “She fought her fight until the very last minute.”

Dyamond would have loved the attention from the Twitter campaign, Diane Ott said, because it helps to promote organ donation and giving people a second chance at life.

“Just getting that out there, if that would just spark anyone’s thought on organ donation, she would be very, very happy,” Ott said.

Grieving online is a common response for

young people, particularly teens, said Nancy Berns, an associate professor of sociology at Drake University and author of “Closure — The Rush to End Grief and What It Costs Us.”

“Students are grieving in terms of sadness and they’re trying to do something in terms of action,” Berns said.

While online tributes will help console some students, they can cause conflict for others because everyone grieves differently, Berns said. Her worry is for close friends and family who will need more support.

“We need to still figure out how to break through that reliance on the virtual communities and how to learn how to reach out there and be there for them,” Berns said. “It’s hard to be physically present online.”

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