

Dufferin residents grieve sudden loss of community builder, boxing coach, motorcycle enthusiast, father and friend

By Sam Odrowski

An Orangeville man who touched almost every corner of Dufferin County through his work and community involvement recently passed away in a three-vehicle collision along Highway 9.

Jamie Ferris, 52, often said, "Live every day to the fullest because you never know how many sunsets you are going to get."

On May 11, he saw his last sunset.

But living to the fullest was something Jamie did well through his ambition, passion and love for life. He founded and operated a non-profit motorcycle riding club called Qwest Riders that donates to various charities each year, touched many lives through coaching boxing and created countless memories at the weddings, local events, and bars he's DJ'd.

Yet, the one thing that mattered most to Jamie was his family.

He leaves behind his three children, Brilee, Tayah and Noah, and baby granddaughter, Ava.

Those close to Jamie say they'll miss his incredible sense of humour, selflessness, infectious smile, big hugs, and loving energy.

The three-vehicle collision that claimed the life of Jamie and his friend, Andrea "Lola" Gernack, on May 11 happened between Mount Wolfe Rd. and Caledon/King Townline on Highway 9. A pickup truck collided with Lola and Jamie while they were each on motorcycles.

Under Jamie's leadership, he's helped fundraise thousands of dollars, toys and pounds of food for the many not-for-profits in the community that support vulnerable people or those struggling financially.

Many of those donations came through Qwest Riders, which he ran as "pres" (president) since creating the club six years ago.

Vice president of Qwest Riders Jay Casey has known Jamie for around 35 years through their involvement in the BMX community from youth to adulthood. They became inseparable over the last decade, working together, building bikes and eventually starting the Qwest Riders motorcycle club.

It started out with a group of about 10-20 people meeting on Sundays at the Orangeville Pita Pit and going on a ride for the day.

Over the past six years, the club has grown to over 60 patched members, and the Facebook group for the club has over 600 members.

Qwest Riders held the Toys for Terry fundraiser for the last four years, donating toys to the Salvation Army and Family Transition Place in memory of Jamie's late friend Terry Tovell.

Tovell was heavily involved in the Orangeville Northmen Lacrosse and passed away at age 44 in 2019.

The fundraiser saw thousands of toys donated to the Salvation Army since its inception in 2019. Monetary donations were also collected for the Northmen's Benevolent Fund.

Jay said Jamie was very sociable, charismatic, a great public speaker, and lit up every room he entered.

?Jamie could get up and talk to 50,000 people?crack jokes, pick people out and make everyone laugh,? he told the Citizen. ?That was his jam. He was that person.?

Jay remembers him as a selfless, nonjudgmental and compassionate individual who would lend a hand to anyone in need.

?He was the kind of guy that would pull over on the side of the road and give a homeless guy his coat,? Jay said. ?He would give the shirt off his back.?

Amy Green, who was in a serious relationship with Jamie, said he was one of a kind, full of life, enjoyed helping others, and always had everyone's back.

?Jamie had the biggest heart, loved his family more than anything and always lived life to the fullest,? Green said. ?He gave the best hugs, had a smile that lit up a room, was full of terrible jokes, one-liners and made everyone laugh.?

Byron Mackie, who opened Orangeville's BigTyme Fitness in 2001 and ran it until it closed in 2019, worked alongside Jamie, who coached boxing there for several years.

?Jamie was a one-of-a-kind type of friend, always had your back no matter what ? great friend, great coach, great dad, great person,? he told the Citizen via email. ?This one hurts real bad and he will be missed tons.?

Jason Alexander has known Jamie for nearly 25 years, and they became close through coaching boxing classes.

Jason said Jamie was loved by many who he trained.

?He was a guy that would drive people to tournaments if they needed to drive, and give people rides home. He would do hand pads with people after hours,? Jason said. ?He would help coach people on the off time, he was very giving to the boxing community that way.?

Jason said he'll remember Jamie as an amazing friend, an incredible source of support, and a caring individual.

?He was always looking to give back to the community, give back to friends, family. He was just an all-around great guy and will be sadly missed. I was super privileged to have him so close to my heart and my family,? he remarked.

Jamie's efforts to give back to the community culminated in a virtual fundraiser shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic started in the spring of 2020.

Jamie came up with the idea of hosting the Soundqwest Virtual Jamzz to help people get off the couch and enjoy a dance party from their own homes. The virtual fundraiser had a Facebook Livestream of Jamie DJing, shared throughout Facebook, reaching over 10,000 views.

Jay, who owns Lux Vape, provided his warehouse as a venue for the fundraiser, and Richard Croft, Amy Green, Dana MacGregor, Tony Fenech, Julie Elsdon-Height, and Julie Thurgood helped to host the event.

The stage was decorated with a collection of vintage 80s items Jay collected over the years, and the backdrop was spray-painted graffiti style to fit the hip-hop vibe of the virtual parties.

Dana MacGregor was on the microphone hyping up the virtual audience while Jamie worked the decks.

?These guys thought they were Run-DMC like it was hilarious. I loved it,? said Jay.

Ultimately, the events generated thousands of dollars to donate electronic tablets to senior homes, helping them stay connected to their families with video calls during lockdowns. The rest of the money raised was split between the Orangeville Food Bank and Headwaters Hospital.

"It was way bigger than we expected," said Dana. "We got an amazing team of volunteers on board, and we had some more sponsors than we knew what to do with."

Dana's known Jamie for 30 years, and they became close friends. He used to MC for Jamie while he DJ'd at bars throughout Orangeville. Jamie would provide the tunes, and Dana would make announcements, give away prizes, and work the microphone.

"We did that for a long time" TJ's [Hangar], Main Street and the Rusty Nail," he recalled. "We were kind of an entertainment duo."

The duo performed almost every Friday and Saturday at TJ's for a couple of years, getting the crowd moving on the dance floor.

Eventually, Jamie's DJing in the local bar scene evolved into the professional DJ service, Soundqwest. Over the years, he became known as one of the best DJs in the region.

Dana told The Citizen that much of his confidence and public personality was shaped during those years of MCing with Jamie.

"The belief that he had in me, and the fact that he wanted to share a stage with me, gave me a level of confidence that I will take with me forever," Dana said. "Jamie Ferris was instrumental in me finding my voice."

Dana said his involvement in sports clubs, boxing, biking and the overall community made him "the glue" that held many different facets of Dufferin County.

"He was this massive connection point for so many," said Dana. "He had his hand in every little piece of what makes this town, this town."

He added, "Jamie could bring all these different groups and people together in a way that I've never seen before."

Reflecting back on Jamie's early beginnings of his DJ career, a close friend since high school, Richard Croft, said, "It all started in a basement on Parkview Dr with two CD players."

From there, he began DJing at bars and eventually built up his Soundqwest business to become one of the most recommended DJs in the area, Richard noted.

He said Jamie was an incredible person and role model.

"No matter whose path he crossed, he left a smile," Richard remarked. "Jamie's the person that you wish the world could be."

Neal Welch, who met Jamie through DJing 15 years ago and later joined Soundqwest DJ, said Jamie was a great entertainer and very community-minded.

"I'll always remember DJing alongside him when we DJ'd Yuk Yuk's Comedy Shows and when we would DJ Christmas parties in the same venue. We would always try and see who could steal the most people and keep them dancing," he recalled.

"Jamie was the type of person who would do anything for his hometown, toy drives, food bank drives."

Jamie's friends say the Orangeville Food Bank had a special place in his heart, and the organization has received countless food

donations through Qwest Riders and other charitable initiatives he led.

“Jamie Ferris and the Qwest Riders have supported the Orangeville Food Bank and other local charities for many years,” said Sarah Clarke, food bank volunteer of nine years, in a written statement. “We are very saddened to hear about his recent passing, and we know he leaves behind a huge hole in the hearts of many in the community that he championed.”

She added, “We are also very saddened to hear of the passing of Andrea Gernack, who participated in the community fundraising events with Qwest Riders and was a supporter of the food bank. “The staff and volunteers send along their deepest condolences to all who feel this tragic loss.”

Sue and David Simpson, who were close friends with Jamie for 25 years, told The Citizen they'll remember Jamie's charisma, quick-witted jokes, huge heart, infectious laugh and sense of humour.

“After meeting Jamie, you would fall in love with him instantly and would feel a connection with him and sense of belonging,” they said in a written statement. “He had an energy about him that was unforgettable. Everyone loved Jamie because he made everyone feel special. He made them feel important. He made them feel loved.”

The Simpsons said Jamie had a “huge soft side to him” and a big heart.

“He loved bringing happiness to people and making a difference in this world,” they said.

To have known him was to love him, said the Simpsons.

“He lived life to the fullest,” they told the Citizen. “You could say that he lived more in his short life than some people do their whole lifetime.

“Whenever we hear a good song or see a beautiful sunset, we will all think of you.”

Celebration of Life Details

Jamie's family is hosting a public event at Hereward Farms (41051 Sideroad 15, East Garafraxa) on May 28 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Words of remembrance will begin at 12:30 p.m. and all motorcycles are asked to arrive from 9:30 to 10:00 a.m. to get in position to pay tribute to Jamie.

Memorial donations to help support Jamie's family can be made via e-transfer at InMemoryOfJamieFerris@gmail.com.