

LATHROP – Jeremy Lum is gone but not forgotten.

Two years after the UC Berkeley graduate's tragic untimely death, his name lives on in a non-profit organization that aims to provide education, information and services which, his family strongly believes, would most probably have saved his life had they been available at the time.

The Lum family, a community pillar for more than six decades, is turning their tragedy into something that would save others from suffering that same tragedy by spearheading advocacy efforts on behalf of those suffering from mental illness. One is an annual Memorial Walk in September, and the other is the founding of a non-profit organization called Justice for Jeremy. The latter is holding its annual Candlelight Memorial Event on Friday, July 8, from 4 to 8 p.m. at Lathrop Road and Woodfield Drive next to Woodfield Park.

The event, which aims to “promote awareness of mental illness,” will include “music, guest speakers, and refreshments. Candles will be provided,” said Connie Lum Perez, Jeremy's aunt who launched the community grassroots effort soon after the death of her nephew.

One of the scheduled speakers is a psychologist, and another is an expert on mental illness, she said. For the second year in a row, American Idol contestant Kyle Thomasson of Stockton will be performing, along with other singers.

Today, Justice for Jeremy is 1,800 members strong and has its own web site, www.justiceforjeremy.org.

“The Justice for Jeremy movement has evolved into a non-profit organization. We're now the Justice for Jeremy – Lathrop, CA, Inc.,” Perez said.

“The specific purpose of Justice for Jeremy – Lathrop, CA Inc. shall be to educate, advocate, assist, intervene, and provide resources and training to law enforcement, first responders, public service agencies, individuals and immediate families of persons who are experiencing a mental-health crisis, are experiencing inadequate responses from public agencies as a result of mental health illness or crisis, (and) are missing persons suffering mental health illness or crisis,” she stated.

“When Jeremy was missing, who did we go to? We had no one. We had the Manteca Bulletin! But there was no organization that I could call. I thought that we could call our own police force and they would put emergency actions into place,” but that did not happen, Perez added.

Jeremy, who was bipolar, was a member of the first senior class to graduate from Sierra High School. He was 28 years old when he died and was a nursing student at Modesto Junior College. His body was found floating in the San Joaquin River a few days after he was released from the county jail in July of 2009 where he was detained overnight. The night before, he was picked up by Lathrop police and taken to the county jail. Police alleged he was under the influence; however, family members contend Jeremy was disoriented and having a bipolar episode. After he was released from jail, barefoot and without any means of transportation, Jeremy vanished touching off an intensive search which included his father,

Jerry, who is a pilot involved in emergency searches and rescues. Jeremy's body was found a few days later in the San Joaquin River not far from the county jail.

A wrongful death lawsuit has been filed by Jeremy's parents, Jerry Lum and Dorothea Timmons, in the United States District Court, Eastern District of California. Trial date is set for August of 2012. Named in the lawsuit are the City of Lathrop, San Joaquin County, two Sheriff's sergeants, and 50 unnamed individuals. The complaint is seeking damages as well as a demand for jury trial.

For more information about the Candlelight Memorial or about Justice for Jeremy, call Connie Lum Perez at (209) 606-8198 or log on to www.justiceforjeremy.org. You can also send an e-mail to justiceforjeremy.org@gmail.com.