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Local Pizzeria Owner Knocks on Doors to Help Hit-and-Run Victims' Families

By Carolyn Schuk

When Oralía Puga-Ramirez and Enedina Oliva were killed in August's fatal hit-and-run on Stevens Creek, not only were their families faced with the sudden loss of a beloved mother and grandmother. They were also suddenly faced with another unanticipated hardship: the price tag of a funeral today.

So when Kirk Vartan, owner of Slice of New York pizzeria on Stevens Creek, read in the paper that Puga-Ramirez and Oliva's families were having difficulty meeting the expenses of a proper funeral and burial, he felt "compelled" to do something – especially because the accident happened so close to the restaurant.

So on the spot he started a fund to help. "I just took a [soft drink] fridge pack box and hand-wrote a sign and started walking down Stevens Creek," he says.

"I just kept walking all the way to Saratoga Ave. and all the way to Santana Row, knocking on doors at every business, asking for donations. Every store that had a door, I went into," he adds.

Vartan's effort was met with an outpouring of generosity from local businesses.

"The owner of Quizno's immediately opened his register to give, and right after that, one of his customers stuffed a few bills in the box," Vartan recalls.

"The Audi dealership let me walk around and speak with the people on the floor as well as the service people in the back. The Arby's manager spoke in Spanish to the workers -- who probably had no idea what had happened -- and they all immediately donated.

"People that probably could not afford to give anything, gave what they could," he continues. "People gave anything from change to \$20s. We even got a \$100 gift from a local store."

So far Vartan has raised almost \$1,400, with more coming in every day as people stop by the pizzeria to donate. Vartan plans to present the donations to the families in the next week. However, Vartan is setting up a way for people to continue to make donations.

"I am very proud that we were able to support these families in some small way," he says.

If you want to donate, stop by Slice of New York at 3443 Stevens Creek Blvd. north of Cypress.

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Slice of NY owner Kirk Vartan carried his improvised donation box up and down Stevens Creek to help families of the August 9 hit-and-run victims.

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