

# Action after two deaths

■ Hundreds help raise money for memorial scholarship and push plans to close school campuses at lunchtime

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The joking and laughing in the crowd of about 300 people who filled D.S. Shanahan's, a sweltering Kings Park bar, belied the somber nature of yesterday's event: to show support for the families of two Smithtown High School West students who died in a car accident in October.

As volunteers collected donations and sold T-shirts to help fund a scholarship in the names of Michael Western and Daniel Distefano, some supporters broke from the jocular mood to stump for proposed measures that would close high school campuses at lunch hour.

Western and Distefano, both 17 at the time, died in Smithtown on Oct. 31 when they were thrown from a car driven by a friend on Jericho Turnpike during a school lunch break.

State Assemb. Michael N. Gianaris (D-Astoria) has presented a bill that would end student privileges to leave campus during lunch statewide, said his spokesman, John Puglisi, in a statement. At least seven fatalities have been reported in the state this school year from students leaving campus during "open campus" lunch hours, the statement said.

Ray Marchand, a close friend of the Western family who helped organize yesterday's event, said he is "all for" such a law. "I think your kid goes to school, you should know your kid's safe in school," Marchand said, adding that yesterday's event was expected to raise about \$10,000.

Ed Wehrheim, a Smithtown town councilman, said he also supports closed campuses and urged the local school district to consider such a rule.

"Students are going to be rushing back to school. It's



PHOTO BY JAMES CARROLL

About 300 help raise money for a scholarship named for Michael Western, below left, and Daniel Distefano, below right. Among them: Western's godfather, Rocky Navelino, far right.

something school boards have to look at," he said.

Closed campus laws are not without detractors. More than 400 people have signed an online petition opposing a plan to close the Northport High School campus.

Deana Shanahan, owner of D.S. Shanahan's, said the law is worth it if it saves lives.

"Kids want their freedom, they want to have that adult feeling, but maybe it does become a safety issue," she said.



## Deadly lunch breaks

**April 10, 2008:** Shortly before noon, three West Hempstead High School teens were involved in a crash. Two die as a result of the accident: one critically injured. **Saul Hernandez Lopez, 17,** a senior from West Hempstead and a novice boxer, dies within an hour of the accident; **Quintin McDonald, 17,** a senior from West Hempstead and an aspiring chef,

died the next day from head trauma.

**Oct. 31, 2007:** Two Smithtown West High School students died in a lunchtime car accident; a third teen who was a passenger in another car died as well. **Michael Western** of Smithtown and **Daniel Distefano** of Nesconset, both 17, died after a car driven by **Steven Badke,** also 17, veered into oncoming traffic on Jericho

Turnpike. **John Aruanno, 13,** of Smithtown, a passenger in the van that collided with the teenagers' vehicle, died from his injuries.

**Sept. 9, 2005:** Near the end of a lunchtime break at Jericho High School, **Matthew Ravner** of Jericho, 17, a senior, jumped onto the running board of a friend's moving sport utility vehicle, fell under a rear tire and later died.