

# Rock and roll remembrance

■ Friends of 2 teens killed in car crash plan fundraising concert, memorial in school courtyard

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Their memories will rock on. Friends of two Smithtown High West teenagers who died in a car crash on Jericho Turnpike in the fall say they can think of a no more fitting way to honor their memories than through rock music — a passion they all had shared.

The friends plan to throw a rock-inspired fundraising concert and build a “rock garden” in honor of Daniel Distefano, of Nesconset, and Michael Western, of Smithtown, both 17, who died Oct. 31 near Caleb Smith State Park after being thrown from a 2004 Honda



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SAGARIN

**Daniel Distefano, left, and Michael Western, both 17, were killed in October.**

Civic driven by a classmate.

“They both had a love for music, and I can see no better way to remember them than by playing music,” said Mike Kennedy, 17, of Hauppauge.

The crash also killed John Aruanno, 13, who was riding in his mother’s minivan when the Civic struck the minivan.

Early in the planning, organiz-

ers had asked the family of Aruanno to participate in the memorial, but the boy’s family said no, according to Craig Cooper, 53, of Smithtown, a producer donating his time to the event.

The Aruanno family’s attorney, Bob Sullivan, of Mineola, confirmed that the family, which is involved in litigation over the crash, chose not to

participate. No one at the school knew John Aruanno, Sullivan said the family reasoned, and, “It would just be too sad an event for them.”

Money raised at the show, scheduled at 7 p.m. May 3 at Smithtown High School West, will go to an Advanced Placement course scholarship fund.

The memorial garden, to go

in the same courtyard as one commemorating the victims of the 9/11 attacks, will be built with donations the students are seeking and is expected to cost between \$5,000 and \$10,000, the students said.

“We hope it will be a place where students can ... relax, and if someone happens to bring an acoustic guitar — I’m sure Dan and Mike would like that too,” said Brett Groneman, 18, of Smithtown.

The students also are hoping Suffolk-area businesses will donate items and services to be auctioned for charity during the show.

In addition to rock music, the students said the event will branch out into all things artistic, ranging from jazz to poetry and photography.

Said Groneman: “With the community’s support, this event will be a huge success full of laughs, some tears, and hopefully some headbanging.”