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Remembering a Lockerbie Victim

07.25.2008 | Service and Giving, Campus and Community, Students  
Peter Sullivan wanted to guarantee that the memory of his good buddy Mike Doyle lived on beyond the horror of the Dec. 21, 1988 terrorist bombing of Pam Am Flight 103.

Friends since their Cherry Hill, New Jersey high school days, Sullivan and Doyle graduated together from the University of Dayton in 1980 and remained good friends, even standing up as best man at each other's weddings.

"He had an effervescent Irish personality. He was quick to smile and fun-loving," Sullivan remembered. "He had a ton of friends and he was pretty spectacular at being able to bring people together."

Sullivan established an annual golf outing at Ramblewood Country Club less than a year after the tragedy. Now in its 19th year, the outing has raised more than $380,000 for a scholarship fund in Doyle's memory.

Doyle was scheduled to take a later flight at 8 p.m. on that December day, but in a hurry to return home from a European business trip to celebrate holidays with his wife Noreen, and their infant daughter, he found an open seat on an earlier flight, Sullivan said.

About an hour after lifting off from London's Heathrow Airport, a bomb in the plane exploded, killing all 259 people aboard, strewn wreckage across the Scottish landscape and killing 11 people on the ground.

When the flight went down over Lockerbie, Scotland and word came that Doyle had been on the plane, Sullivan said he and Doyle's friends were devastated and immediately began thinking of ways to honor and remember him.

A golf tournament to raise funds for scholarships in Doyle's memory was a natural fit, Sullivan said.

"He loved to golf and had a 12 to 14 handicap. He was a great athlete," Sullivan said.

So he contacted the Ramblewood Country Club in western New Jersey, located about 15 miles from Philadelphia, where Doyle had played his last round of golf with Sullivan in late November.

The first golf outing was held in October, 1989. A website for the event, http://mjdgolf.homestead.com/ contains outing details and photos.

Over the years, the Michael J. Doyle Memorial Scholarship Fund has awarded 48 scholarships totaling $112,500 to students in the University of Dayton's accounting program. Currently valued at $385,400, the fund will help students for many years to come.

According to Ron Burrows, chair of the accounting department at the University of Dayton, the scholarship fund has become very important to the department and its students.

"Now that a fifth year of school is generally required for accounting majors wishing to become eligible for the CPA exam, the increased cost has become overwhelming for many students and their families," Burrows said.

"We are especially appreciative of the fund that honors the memory of Michael Doyle. It has grown quickly to be the largest such fund for accounting majors and it continues to grow each year through the efforts of the Doyle family and his friends, especially Peter Sullivan. This fund has already provided tremendous assistance to many deserving students and will continue to do so for years to come."

Sullivan said that he's tried to contact the scholarship recipients to tell them about Doyle.

"I've tried to reach out to each and every one of those students," Sullivan said. "I've met or communicated with each and every one of them, and may have even cut an extra check in memory of my buddy."

A successful executive with First Energy near Cleveland, Sullivan said the golf outing draws people together every year in the fall
for fun and to honor Doyle's memory. About 15 to 20 are the core of the 100 golfers who come together to lift a glass in Doyle's memory.

A highlight of the event is the annual presentation of the tournament's trophy, custom-designed by Waterford Crystal. Sullivan contacted Waterford when planning the first outing because he wanted something to honor Doyle's Irish heritage and other victims of the bombing.

"Waterford designed it, manufactured it, shipped it and paid for it all. It was done completely out of their goodwill," Sullivan said.

"It's always pretty spectacular. I'm not surprised that we still come together in his memory," Sullivan said. "He's still bringing people together."