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Crash victim, 20, called "shining light"

By Peyton Whitely
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Robert Vasen graduated from Bellevue High in 2003.

Friends and associates remember a young man who died from injuries in a Bellevue car crash over the weekend as an exemplary student and athlete.

Robert Vasen, 20, died Sunday at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle from injuries suffered in the collision, which took place about 11:30 p.m. Saturday in downtown Bellevue. Ten other people were injured in the Saturday crash.

"I've known Robert since he was in the fourth grade," said Eric McDowell, activities director at Bellevue High School, where Vasen graduated in 2003. "He was a great kid, a good student, great athlete. He was just such a shining light. He was one of the best kids I'd had in 14 years of teaching."

"He was a neat young man. A sweetheart of a kid," said Tony D'Alessio, a neighbor in Beaux Arts Village, where the Vasen family moved about three years ago from the Hunts Point home where Vasen grew up.

McDowell said Vasen had persevered to overcome a staph infection in his knee that he'd contracted at soccer camp. Vasen later went to the University of Washington, where he was studying business and marketing, McDowell said.

McDowell said the collision was particularly tragic because it involved many of the families who had suffered through a 1998 accident that killed another Bellevue High student, Brandon West. West, who had played on the Bellevue High basketball and football teams, was 17 when he died in the Interstate 5 crash near Mount Vernon. McDowell said the families were a close-knit group and had kept in touch over the years.

Police reported that Saturday night's collision took place at 108th Avenue Northeast and Northeast Second Street when a Jeep Cherokee struck the rear driver's-side door of a BMW, in which Vasen was a back-seat passenger. The BMW was carrying five people, and the Jeep

had six occupants.

Both drivers were arrested for investigation of vehicular assault, police reported. Police suspect alcohol was involved but said they were awaiting the results of toxicology tests.

The driver of the Jeep, a 21-year-old from Sequim, appeared Monday at a bail-setting hearing where a judge determined there was probable cause to arrest him on suspicion of vehicular homicide and vehicular assault, with bail set at \$350,000.

Court documents indicated the Jeep was being driven east on Northeast Second Street approaching 108th Avenue Northeast and failed to stop for a red light, hitting the northbound 1990 BMW.

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