

# The Matt Garcia Foundation

## A Family and a Community Keeping a Young Man's Dream Alive

By Matt Beardmore

**T**eresa Courtemanche would give anything to watch her son, Matt, jump in his prized, chromed-out Cadillac CTS and head off to the barbershop to get his fade trimmed again. It would bring a wide smile to Teresa's face if she could once again hear him tease her for submitting another Survivor contestant application. Teresa would also love to listen to Matt wow her with his uncanny ability to remember the name of everyone he ever met.

Sadly, though, Teresa has not seen or spoken with her first-born child in more than 15 years. Less than two months after celebrating his 22nd birthday, Matt was gunned down on Labor Day 2008 while visiting a friend in the Cordelia neighborhood of Fairfield, California, in what was called a case of mistaken identity. Just a few days later, Matt Garcia was laid to rest, leaving his family, friends, and community shocked and brokenhearted.

"When we lost Matt, it was horrific," Teresa said. "It changed everyone forever."

From the moment he was born on July 14, 1986, at Travis Air Force Base – in the same hospital where Teresa entered this world 19 years earlier – to the moment he was taken off life support at John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek on Sept. 2, 2008, Matt Garcia made an indelible mark on his family, his friends, and the Fairfield community that he loved dearly. Less than a year before his tragic death, Matt Garcia, at 21, was elected as a Fairfield City Councilman – he was well on his way of achieving his dream of one day becoming the city's mayor.

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Matt Garcia

“Matt...dreamed of “supporting the youth and creating places for them to go and things for them to do; changing a culture of violence and crime in the city through youth involvement.” While Matt left far too soon, his mission was not forgotten as just three months after his murder, The Matt Garcia Foundation was created so his work to support local youth, change the culture of violence and crime, and uniting the people of Fairfield would continue.

“We’ve been able to keep the foundation going all this time,” said Teresa, the president of the all-volunteer non-profit. “People still want to be a part of it. It truly is a gift. It’s incredible.”

Each year, approximately 150 volunteers pitch in as the foundation partners with a number of organizations and the City of Fairfield for different events, such as the annual

Halloween and Tree Lighting events, and Summer Night Out, just to name a few.

The Matt Garcia Foundation's "Drive to Keep the Dream Alive" is its biggest annual fundraiser, and it also uses funds raised from the annual golf tournament to support events and organizations, such as sponsorships of sports teams and the \$7,000 Assist-A-Grad scholarships it awards to 11 local high school students every year.

One of the foundation's most important events is the Monthly Community Service Day Cleanup on the final Saturday of every month. "Matt used to go downtown in his suit and would stop at Starbucks and then pick up trash," Teresa said. "He used to say, 'if you see trash, don't walk by – just pick it up. It's not that hard.'"

The Matt Garcia Foundation also facilitates a homicide survivors group the second Tuesday of every month, while Raymond, Teresa's husband and Matt's stepfather, "hosts an open discussion for transitional aged youth" on the first Thursday of every month at the foundation's downtown Fairfield office.

All the foundation's good work is definitely being noticed as it recently received a sizable donation from the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce. "We just got picked to be the recipients of the dessert auction at the chamber's holiday mixer," Teresa said. "We received \$6,050 – it was amazing!"

While there is still much to accomplish for The Matt Garcia Foundation, Teresa always finds time to visit her son at his gravesite at Fairmont Memorial Park in Fairfield, changing flowers and adding small clip-on birds or butterflies from Michaels craft store. She understands that is where her son's body was laid to rest, but for her and many others, Matt is still very present. His voice, his passion, and his desire to help others lives through his mother, his stepfather, his sisters Briana and Tea'Rae, the rest of his family, his friends, the community, the 200 or so 6th through 8th graders attending the Matt Garcia Career and College Academy in Fairfield, and the organ recipients who received a new lease on life when Matt lost his.

"He's still alive in many ways," Teresa said.

Please visit <https://mattgarciafoundation.org> for more detail on The Matt Garcia Foundation.

