



Kenneth J. Cullen



Kenny Cullen had just left a Father's Day gathering at his aunt and uncle's house in Kirkville on Sunday. "He told me he loved me and left," said his father, John Cullen. About a half-hour later, Cullen said he received the phone call no parent ever wants to get. His son Matt Cullen called. Kenny was dead, he said. Kenneth Cullen, 26, of East Syracuse, was killed in a motorcycle crash shortly before 7 p.m. Sunday, just south of the railroad bridge on the Onondaga Lake Parkway near Liverpool. His motorcycle veered into oncoming traffic and struck an SUV head-on, Onondaga County sheriff's detectives have said. Both vehicles exploded into flames; Cullen was killed instantly, police said. Another motorcyclist who crashed when he struck by debris, and the driver of the SUV, were injured. Matt Cullen said he was riding a motorcycle behind his brother. He stopped and ran to Kenny immediately after the crash, he said. "I gave my brother his final hug," Matt Cullen said Monday evening at a candlelight vigil overlooking the accident scene along the parkway. "My brother was a good dude." About 100 friends and family members gathered on a grassy hill next to where Kenny was killed a day earlier to remember him as a father, brother, son and friend. Some wore T-shirts in his memory. They lit candles, hugged, cried, and placed flowers and photographs at the foot of a wooden cross that read, "P-U-N-K" and was draped in a red "Down 4 Life Supporter" motorcycle club T-shirt. Arthur "AJ" Cramer, of East Syracuse, said had just seen his friend a couple weeks ago. Cramer said he graduated from East Syracuse Minoa High School in 2007; Kenny Cullen's family said he graduated from ESM in 2006. Cramer said he remembers the time when Cullen tried to take off in the grass on his first motorcycle several years ago. But the grass was wet and he tipped the bike over, and fell into a mud puddle in a white T-shirt. Another 2007 ESM graduate, Jordan Dunn, now of Clay, said he remembers playing Pop Warner football with Cullen, when Cullen's father was the coach. Cullen, a Philadelphia Eagles fan since childhood, later played junior varsity and varsity football and baseball at ESM High School, John Cullen said. "He could throw them out from home to second (base)," Cullen said of his son's baseball skills as a catcher. Kenny Cullen was a running back on the football team, his father said. "He averaged 40 yards a run," John Cullen said. "There were times they couldn't even get him down. It would take five, six guys and he was on one foot jumping getting a couple more yards." But William Gillard, also a 2007 ESM graduate, said he will

always remember a funny story from when he played JV football with Kenny Cullen. "He was on the 3-yard line and tripped with no one around him," Gillard said. As family and friends shared stories about Cullen, thunder crackled and a few raindrops fell. The crowd then dispersed. "Kenny would be saying don't be crying over him," his stepmother, Sharon Cullen, said as she and Kenny's father stood alone -- taking one last look at where his son died. John Cullen said Kenny started working when he was 15 years old and saved enough money to buy his first car when he turned 18. He worked at a hotel when he was younger, then as a machine operator at Plainville Farms' processing facility in Liverpool until a few years ago. He worked as a heavy equipment operator for Syracuse Recycling and Recovery until it caught fire last summer. Since then, his father said, he's worked various jobs to keep busy. Family and friends described Cullen as always helping others. He once built a deck for an aunt, even though he had never taken on such a project, said family friend Rebecca Paoff, of Cayuga. They also remembered how Cullen danced with his daughter, Danika Besner, now 3, at his brother Matt's wedding in April. And they will always remember how much Cullen loved riding his motorcycle. Steven Glen, of Syracuse, said the last time he rode with Cullen was Saturday, the day before the crash. "We cruised everywhere," he said. "We just rode." The vice president of the Syracuse chapter for Down 4 Life motorcycle club, who would only identify himself as JR, said Cullen was prospecting and "making his way into the family." The club, which has 11 members in its Syracuse chapter, is planning a memorial ride for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday. Motorcyclists will meet at the overflow parking lot at Destiny USA in Syracuse, organizers said. "He loved to ride. He loved to help people out. He'd give you the shirt off his back," John Cullen said. "I'm not supposed to bury my kid," he said, still staring at the skid marks on the parkway. "My kid's supposed to bury me." Kenny Cullen is survived by his daughter, Danika Besner; his father and stepmother, John and Sharon Cullen, of Brewerton; his mother, Tammy Stevenson, of Auburn; his siblings, Matt Cullen, of East Syracuse, Jennifer Stevenson, of Auburn, and Jordan Ostrander, of Auburn; and a stepbrother, Jim Sauta, of Brewerton.

