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Scholarship established in honor of Nicolet girl who died

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Staff Writers

A scholarship fund in memory of Fox Point's Brittney Gigl, 17, who died Aug. 15, was set up Monday at Nicolet High School.

Those wishing to contribute should make checks payable to the Nicolet High

School Foundation because such contributions are tax-deductible, and designate on the check that it is for the Brittney Gigl Memorial Scholarship Fund.

Meanwhile, test results were expected to be in this week on the exact cause of death. As of press time Tuesday morning, the results were not known. Medical authorities were convinced from the

start that the cause of death was some form of viral encephalitis, possibly transmitted from a mosquito or tick. Deaths from viral encephalitis are extremely rare, said North Shore Health Department Director Jane Peterson.

Brittney had been at Camp Interlaken in Eagle River for the last two months. She was a counselor-in-training

at the Jewish Community Center-run camp. She had spent nine summers at the camp as a camper and as a CIT, said Kipp Friedman, JCC public relations and marketing director.

Counselors and about 250 campers, some as young as 8 or 9, attend each four-week camp session, he estimated.

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No other cases have been reported, even though the JCC sent letters to all the families of campers and counselors instructing them to watch for headaches or stiff necks and to report them to their family doctors immediately as a precaution, Friedman said.

"The community was saddened by this tragic loss," Friedman said. "And the community is doing its best to deal with it."

JCC provides counseling

Last Thursday, the day after Brittney died, the JCC offered counseling and support groups with a psychologist, a rabbi and a social worker to the sixth-grade girls who were in the cabin that Brittney helped supervise, and other JCC camp counselors.

Camp ended Aug. 13, and Brittney attended an athletic practice at Nicolet High School on Tuesday. Although she complained of a headache, she went out with friends Tuesday night. Those friends noticed that she was extremely thirsty.

Brittney died at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin Wednesday night. Services were held Friday.

Wisconsin averaged 24 cases of encephalitis per year from 1990 to 1999, Peterson said. Those statistics, compiled by the State Division of Health, do not indicate how many cases resulted in death. "Actual serious cases are real rare," Peterson said, and deaths would be even more uncommon.

Of the 24 Wisconsin cases per year, 11

are usually from mosquito bites and 13 follow viral infections, such as measles and mumps, Peterson said. Viral encephalitis is a general term that refers to a family of similar diseases, she said. Encephalitis is an irritation of tissues surrounding the brain, she said, and August appears to be the peak month for reports of cases in Wisconsin.

JCC has operated Camp Interlaken for 36 seasons and this is the first time a case of suspected encephalitis may have been connected with it, Friedman said.

A scholar-athlete

Brittney, who would have been a senior at Nicolet High School, completed the first two practice sessions for the volleyball team the day before she died. An honor student who ranked in the top

4 percent of her class, she also played basketball and volleyball at Nicolet.

The school mailed letters to parents last week detailing actions officials there are taking in response to her death, which Superintendent Elliott Moeser called "a tragic loss." He said the school would continue to monitor the situation and offer the student's family assistance.

"Although the likely cause of death is known, there is no reason to believe that any illness has been passed to other members of the community," he wrote, adding that "doctors have strong reason to believe that the illness is rare and not contagious."