

Friends honor memory of UF junior

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Carol Reyes / Alligator

More than 20 of her friends gathered to paint a mural on the 34th Street wall on Sunday in honor of Katelyn Derstine, a UF student who died in a car accident on Thursday.

Orange acrylic butterflies fluttered across sunny yellow paint and brightened the west side of campus on a gloomy Sunday afternoon.

About 25 students painted the 34th Street Wall in memory of their friend, UF junior Katelyn Derstine, who died in a car accident Thursday morning.

"We're doing this not only to mourn her, but to honor what she did and who she was," said Andrew Marcus, a friend and passenger in the crash.

Derstine and her friends were on their way to the Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival in Manchester, Tenn., when a Porsche Boxster clipped their Ford F-250 pickup truck on Interstate 75. Both drivers overcorrected, and the truck flipped.

Charges are pending for the driver of the Porsche, Benjamin Taylor Stanley, 18, of Whitfield County, Ga., according to the Georgia State Patrol.

Emergency medical personnel transferred Derstine to Erlanger Medical Center in Chattanooga, Tenn., where she died from head injuries.

The funeral service was held Monday afternoon at Church of the Palms in Sarasota, Derstine's hometown.

The truck's driver, Philip Deberard, and two other passengers, Kelly Perona and Marcus, suffered only minor cuts and bruises.

Kelly Perona was Derstine's big sister in the Alpha Chi Omega Sorority.

They first met in a floral art course, where Derstine, an environmental horticulture major, was Perona's teaching assistant.

"She wanted to be a horticultural therapist," said Kenny Perona, Kelly's brother and Derstine's boyfriend of almost a year. "She was really good with plants and loved butterflies."

Monarch butterflies surrounded the words "Fly High Katelyn" on the 34th Street wall. Friends signed a pair of cards for Derstine's parents.

Lauren Perona, Kelly and Kenny's mother, said UF officials have been extremely supportive to Derstine's family and the other UF students in the crash.

"From a mom's perspective, it makes me feel good that they can do this," Lauren Perona said. "I was pretty amazed."

Beneath a dull gray sky, Derstine's friends wielded paintbrushes, sharing tears and a few laughs as they finished the tribute for their friend.

"Her middle name is Joy and that's just so appropriate," Lauren Perona said.

Amanda Picken, a UF junior, was a longtime friend of Derstine. They went to the same high school and joined the same UF sorority.

"I think it was just really surreal for all of us," Picken said.

Derstine's friends have directed their grief in a number of directions - even creating a Facebook.com group in her memory.

"The fact that people came out on Father's Day shows what an awesome person she was," Kelly Perona said.

She said she was planning to paint the 34th Street Wall for Derstine's 21st birthday next April.