

SmokeSignals

Newsletter of KaitKares, Inc. - a Fire Safety Advocacy Nonprofit

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KaitKares, Inc.

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Letter from the President

Reflecting on these past 16 months as I write this letter for our first KaitKares newsletter, I am overwhelmed with so many emotions. Feelings of sadness, grief, love, friendship, pride, kindness, caring, uncertainty, and worry. Never in a million years did I ever expect to find myself here. After losing my daughter Kaitlyn in July of 2019 in a tragic apartment fire in Austin, I didn't think it could get much worse. Yet, so much has happened since then. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected so many people around the globe, it has impacted and changed all our lives. It changed the way we connect with each other, the way we love each other, the way we communicate with each other, and the way we live. It's as if the whole world just paused. We at KaitKares want you to know that we are thinking of you and your loved ones during these unprecedented times.

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From the President - cont'd from page 1

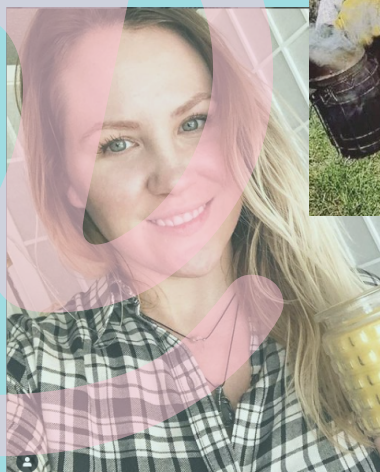
I hope you enjoy reading our newsletter and know how much we miss getting out there in the public and seeing you all. We were disappointed to have to postpone our events and fundraisers year, but we promise to be back next year better than ever. We want you to know that we are still working hard and have made some great alliances that we hope you enjoy reading about in this newsletter. KaitKares began out of love for Kaitlyn and Joseph; to keep their memory alive and ensure fire safety for everyone through education and ultimately law reform. Without your love and support, we would not have been able to come so far in such a short amount of time. Please sign up for future newsletters so we can keep you updated on our goals, initiatives and progress. Lastly, I hope you will continue to support and partner with us.

Stay safe and remember to always have a fire safety plan for you and your family.

Sincerely,
Kim Denson, President
KaitKares, Inc.

Kudos Korner

A HUGE shout out to Ms. Joanna Page, our first Social Media Manager as we began this journey. We could not have done it without you and will be forever grateful for your contributions and for your continued support of KaitKares. We will be cheering you on in your new endeavors including your amazing beeswax candles. Click [here](#) to visit her shop!



Building Alliances

At KaitKares we are amazed by the organic partnerships that have developed over the last year and one that has proven to be the most educational is that with the National Fire Sprinkler Association. Below is an article by Cindy Ciedraitis, the South Central Regional Manager of NFSA.

Burn Me Once - Don't Burn Me Again! **What does a fire survivor really want?** by Cindy Giedraitis, *South Central Regional Manager, NFSA*

NO MORE MULTI-FAMILY FIRES!

Fire fatalities and injuries still occur for existing unsprinklered multi-family buildings in Texas. After a fire, many times the rebuild does not include fire sprinklers as existing building codes for rebuilding are unclear and ambiguous where the threshold lies for “bringing it up to code”. NFSA is working with Fire Survivors and Texas Fire Marshals to better understand the problem and develop local solutions for Texas Fire Protection and Building Officials to model and use.

TEXAS FATAL FIRES

The Iconic Village Apartments in San Marcos Texas tragically lost 5 occupants on July 20, 2018: Dru Estes, 21; 21; Haley Frizzel, 19; James Miranda, 23; Belinda Moats, 21; and David Ortiz, 21. Fire Marshal Kelly Kistner, Fire Chief Les Stephens and the City of San Marcos City Council have recently adopted a “Burn Me Once – Don’t Burn Me Again” local ordinance. This ordinance more specifically defines when an apartment building must be re-built to current fire codes after suffering a fire.

Almost one year later and 30 miles north of San Marcos; Kaitlyn Denson, 26 years old and her friend Joseph Tarin perished in an Austin Apartment Fire on July 15, 2019. The building has been rebuilt and is now fire sprinkler protected as of July 2020. The incident was the fourth fire at that apartment complex in the last ten years.

Kaitlyn’s Mother – Kim Denson has formed a non-profit FireSafety Advocacy Association – “KaitKares” - to honor Kaitlyn and promote fire safety education and legislation. The City of Austin Fire Marshals Office is considering a more specific fire sprinkler retrofit ordinance like San Marcos. No Fire sprinklers were present in both apartment fires as local codes did not require sprinklers when they were built.

FIRE PROTECTION THAT WORKS

Former Texas State Fire Marshal Chris Connealy examined Texas Multi-family fire data over a 10 year period and wrote an Insurance Journal article which documented that “not one person has been killed in a fire in from 2002-2012 inside an apartment complex that was equipped with a fire sprinkler system.” Several Texas Cities have adopted Multi-family fire protection ordinances that more specifically addresses how to rebuild a multifamily building after it has suffered a fire. These cities include Plano, TX, Lewisville, TX and San Marcos, TX.

To learn more about Multi-family Fire Protection in Texas; please contact cindyg@nfsa.org



Forever in Our Hearts and Always on Our Mind

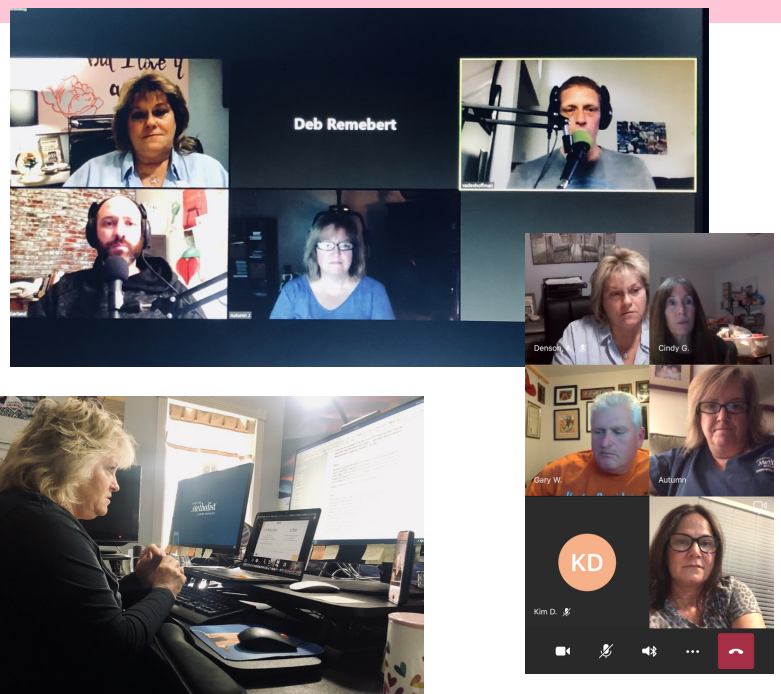
To mark the one-year anniversary of Kaitlyn's passing, friends left "voicemail" messages with stories of missing her and yet seeing and feeling her presence everywhere. *Click the image to listen.*

How We Got Here...

Year One was a whirlwind for KaitKares - with the support of many amazing volunteers and financial contributions from extremely generous individuals and corporations, we were able to accomplish so much in 2019 and then 2020 took the wind out of our sails a bit. However, as we glance back we fondly recall that we were able to strengthen our partnerships and continue our mission in ways we never expected.

Even though our in-person fundraising events were canceled, we were able to raise some necessary funds as the nominee of Bypass Mobile for the StartUp Games in Austin and through our recent GoFundMe online fundraiser.

We zoomed our way to a larger audience as we recorded a podcast with My Corner of the Universe and our president, Kim Denson, delivered a moving presentation as part of the National Fire Sprinkler Association's Texas Chapter Training Seminar in October.





Still Rockin' Our World

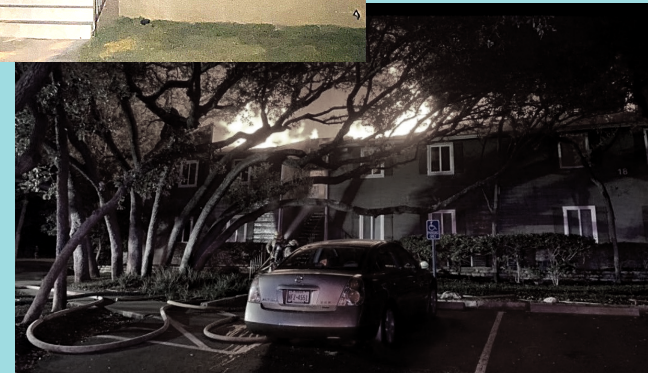
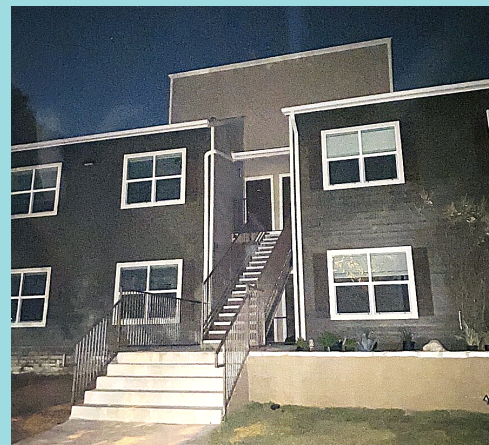
Even after her passing, Kaitlyn continues to bless us with her presence in big and small ways- a white fluffy feather, a cardinal visiting the bird feeder, a dragonfly zipping by to say “hello, ” a favorite song on the radio that brings back a great memory, reminders that she is always with us.... She is everywhere.

The painted heart rock was found in the parking lot right after Kaitlyn's death and was the inspiration behind the rock painting project that proved very therapeutic and a small way to keep the memories of Kaitlyn and Joseph alive.

Joseph's friends planted a fig tree for him on Ladybird trail in Austin where he loved to run and bike. KaitKares and a few of his close friends painted rocks and placed around his tree. It was a special day, and we encourage you to visit his tree and place a special rock in his honor or take one to inspire you on your journey!

Where Do We Go From Here?

We've seen legislative changes at the city level regarding sprinkler systems in older public housing high rises and a Short Term Rental (STR) ordinance to preserve the health and safety to their neighborhoods, both directly relating to fire safety. And there's more work to be done, but we at KaitKares view every small change as a victory - as with substantially larger windows in a rebuild.



The KaitKares Board

Kim Denson – President and Founder

Kaitlin's mom and founder. Early on she made a commitment to ensure that Kaitlyn and Joseph would not only be remembered, but that from this tragedy there would be significant effort to increase fire safety awareness and ultimately fire code law reform. This is the driving principle behind everything we do at KaitKares.

Connie Montalbo, 1st VP (Development)

Kim's friend for more than a decade and Girl Scout Troop leader to Kaitlyn in elementary/middle school. As a nurse leader she brings her expertise to support the organization on strategy and development.

Deb Rembert, 2nd VP (Communications)

With knowledge and experience in communication and relationship building, Deb supports the communications arm including social media.

Lindsey Smith – Event Coordinator

Kaitlyn's BFF and partner in world travel, Lindsey is passionate and driven to support the organization with her experience in events as well as in education.

Autumn Jamison – Secretary

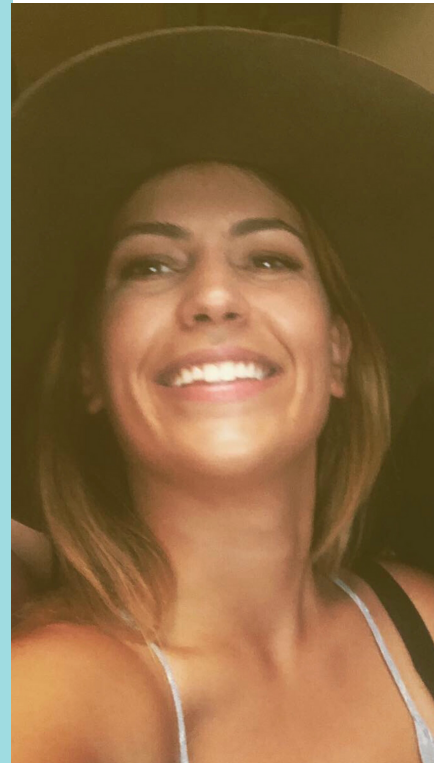
Autumn brings a wealth of experience in supporting nonprofit organizations and volunteer efforts and has been instrumental in getting KaitKares off to a solid start by ensuring all legal and regulatory requirements are met.

Silena Kennedy – Treasurer

A numbers girl at heart with a business mind for excellent bookkeeping, Silena keeps track of all of the financials.

many
thanks

Our heartfelt gratitude to all that have contributed to our ongoing fundraising efforts - large or small, we are so very appreciative of every donation.



Join Us...

It would be a thrill to have you join our team - click [here](#) to get involved.