

Picture an LI grandfather's grief



THE COLUMN

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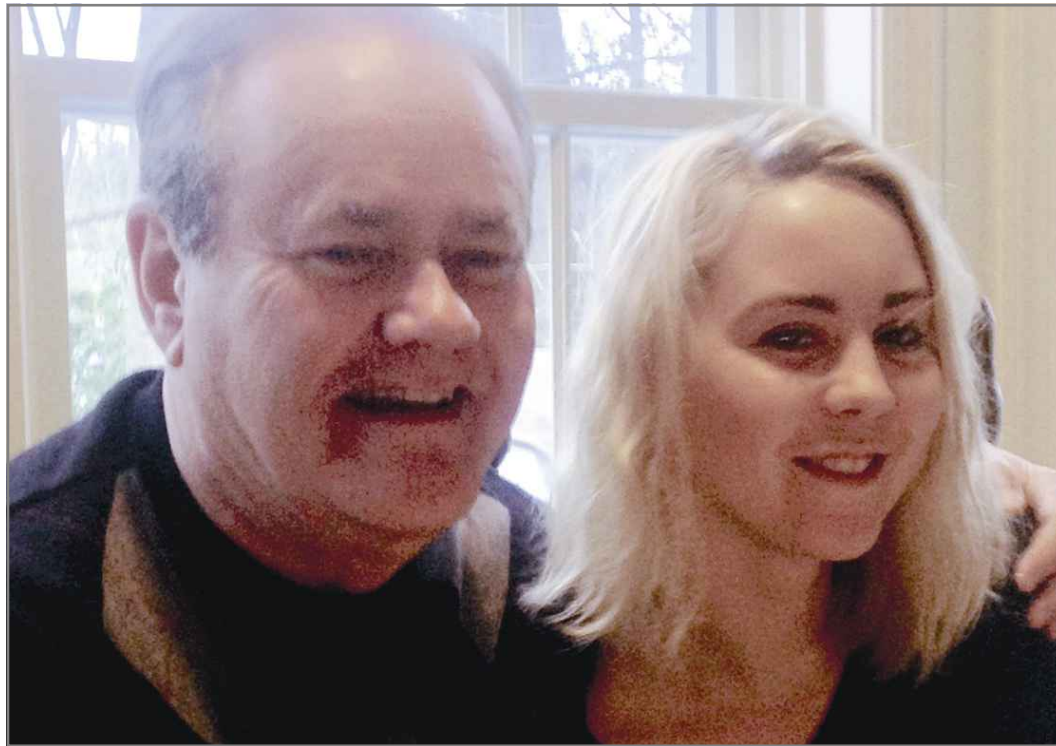
Drew Scott, a former anchor for News 12 Long Island, pulled up a photograph of his granddaughter on a tablet last week as he and two other reporters sat in comfortable, upholstered chairs before a crowd at the Huntington Chamber of Commerce's media breakfast.

Scott looked at the photo and turned the tablet toward chamber members. He wanted them to see the face of Hallie Rae Ulrich. She loved art and once attended Pratt Institute — and her body, Scott had just told the audience, had been dumped on the side of a road after she overdosed on opioids.

Scott said he received a call from his daughter after police issued a release seeking help in identifying a body found at 6:30 a.m. on the grassy shoulder of Alewife-Brook Road, north of Terry Road, in East Hampton, on Sept. 7 last year.

The body was described by police as a woman in her 20s, with light brown shoulder-length hair, about 5-foot-4 and about 100 pounds. There was an owl tattoo on the woman's right wrist, and a tattoo of two interlocking rings on the inside of her upper left arm.

Scott, who now works for LI News Radio, said he was in the area during that time but, as with grieving families he no doubt covered as a reporter over the years, had no idea any-



Drew Scott, a former anchor for News 12 Long Island, with his granddaughter Hallie Rae Ulrich.

thing was amiss in his family.

That changed with a phone call from his daughter.

"That body?" she told him. "I think it's Hallie."

Hallie loved owls, Scott explained to the audience. And the interlocking rings were Hallie's way of showing the pride of being a twin.

The family went to the morgue to identify Hallie, and the weight of that remembrance rings clearly in the sound of his voice.

As moderator for the panel, which also included Peter Sloggett, publisher and managing

editor of The Long Islander Group's newspapers, and David Winzelberg, a reporter for the Long Island Business News, I was standing as Drew spoke.

And from that vantage point, I noticed that — despite Scott's best effort — many in the room could not see the tablet or the photograph he had called up and lifted so gently.

Should I walk over and ask to take the tablet?

Would it be disrespectful if I lifted it higher, and walked it around the room?

But, almost in a blink, the opportunity seemed lost, and it

was time for the program to move on.

Scott spoke of his granddaughter in an answer to a question I had put to the panel: "What stories did we miss, what stories did we undercover last year?"

Last week, Suffolk said it would follow Nassau's lead in adding opioids and other controlled substances to the county's social host law, which makes homeowners responsible for alcohol use by minors.

And earlier this month, Long Island authorities were projecting — pending out-

standing toxicology reports — that as many as 600 people died last year from opioid overdoses, according to a Newsday report. Nationally, for 2016, there were more than 60,000 fatalities.

Those numbers represent people. And their grieving families. And the impact that an unrelenting wave of deaths is having on communities.

Would more of a sense of urgency, more help, come if, say, Long Island could see the faces of all 600 projected fatalities for 2017? (For that matter, would there have been a chance for more attention on getting help, and less on making arrests, had the same been true during the crack epidemic of the 1980s?)

"There is a stigma to opiate deaths," Scott said. "Many families are embarrassed, and hide the fact that their kid is addicted or, God forbid, died."

Scott, who is co-chairing a Southampton Opioid Addiction Task Force, said he wanted to change that — just as the parents of Natalie Ciappa, a Plainedge High School honors student, wanted to do in 2008. Her family found her body on a sofa in a garage where a party had been held the night before.

And just as the parents of others who died of overdoses have tried to do too in neighborhoods across Long Island.

So, yeah, Drew, I should have asked for that tablet.

I should have raised that photograph of Hallie, and with it, the memory of some 3,162 Long Island lives lost to opioids since 2010.

Cuomo seeks tax programs, rules on felony-charged docs

BY MICHAEL GORMLEY
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ALBANY — Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo on Friday proposed to crack down on physicians such as the Olympic doctor who was convicted of sexually abusing gymnasts.

Cuomo also proposed new funding to implement early voting before elections.

The plans were contained in Cuomo's amendments to his 2018-19 state budget that he submitted to the State Legislature.

The amendments didn't in-

clude Cuomo's congestion pricing proposal to raise revenue for mass transit while reducing traffic congestion in Manhattan. That remains under negotiation with legislative leaders and could still become law this year, Cuomo spokesman Rich Azzopardi said.

As expected, Cuomo included his proposal for a voluntary payroll tax and charitable contribution plan to help some high-earning New Yorkers who pay high property taxes.

Those voluntary programs would help some New Yorkers

avoid increased federal income taxes under a new federal tax law. The federal tax law caps the deductibility of state and local taxes at \$10,000 in exchange for doubling the standard deduction, which will result in a federal tax cut for most middle class New Yorkers.

Cuomo also proposes to "decouple" the state tax code from the federal tax code to ease the effects of the cap on deductibility of state and local taxes.

New to the budget was a measure to order physicians charged with a felony, related

to their practice, that may be a public threat, to immediately stop practicing medicine. The proposal comes after the conviction of Olympic physician Larry Nassar last month of sexually abusing girls and women for years.

Under current state law, a physician charged with such a felony but not convicted could continue practicing until the case is decided, Azzopardi said.

Other Cuomo proposals include:

- Requiring pharmacists to provide flu vaccines for children 2

to 18 years, even if their families can't pay. Current law doesn't allow pharmacists to provide flu shots to anyone under 18.

- Further restrict sex offenders whose victims were under 13 years old from traveling or living near schools and temporary shelters for families.

- \$7 million to implement a proposal to allow voting as early as 12 days before an election. Early voting would require legislative approval.

A budget negotiated with the legislature is due April 1.