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As a tribute to Kelsey Justin Stevens, more than 200 Wagner College students and faculty members lit candles and assembled in a large circle around the perimeter of the school's Oval, with a smaller circle of speakers and students — all of whom were members of Stevens' class — inside the Oval.

SUICIDE NOTE FOUND NEXT TO WAGNER STUDENT'S BODY IN BRONX PARK

Campus rocked by death

Senior theater major 'confused' in pre-dawn phone call, roommate says

By **JOHN ANNESE**
and **KIAWANA RICH**
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

A well-liked Wagner College upperclassman who went missing after leaving his dorm room was found dead Tuesday afternoon in the woods of Van Cortlandt

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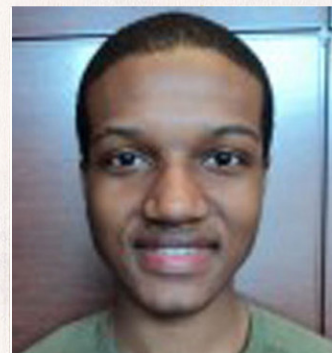
For additional photos from the vigil, go to silive.com/photos.

Park in the Bronx, college administrators and police said.

An NYPD spokesman said a suicide note and a quantity of pills were discovered beside the body of Kelsey Justin Stevens, 22, of New Jersey. The dreadful news

prompted an outpouring of grief on the Grymes Hill campus. "It hit us like a ton of bricks," said Tony Martinesi, Wagner's director of security.

Stevens was last seen by his roommate, on Monday, the first day of classes. He was supposed to have been on his way to a doctor's appointment in Manhattan, according to police and school officials.



STEVENS: Recalled as a beacon of light and love

SEE DEATH, PAGE A 14



STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE PHOTOS/HILTON FLORES

Wagner College students and faculty members take part in a candlelight vigil on the campus in memory of Kelsey Justin Stevens.

DEATH FROM PAGE A 1

Wagner campus rocked by student's death

Sometime after his disappearance, Stevens called his roommate to say he had woken up in the woods in the Bronx, according to police. The roommate, Brendan McCann, said Stevens sounded "confused" in the 5 a.m. Tuesday call; he didn't elaborate on the brief conversation.

"Before I knew it, it was 12 hours later and I got the news," he said.

The body was discovered shortly after 1 p.m.

An autopsy will be conducted on Wednesday, said Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the city medical examiner's office.

Stevens, a senior majoring in theater and speech who had prominent roles in several Wagner productions, had just welcomed Wagner's Class of 2017 over the weekend as one of the college's orientation coordinators. He'd worked on the campus full-time most of the summer in that capacity.

During a candlelight vigil in front of Main Hall, more than 200 students and faculty remembered Stevens, known to most as Justin, as a classmate, leader and friend who was a beacon of light and love.

They lined the entire Oval and a smaller circle of speakers and students — all of them members of his class — assembled inside the Oval.

"He is a light. He shined bright even if it was short, and I hope that as we look to the stars we will see him and we will continue to hold him in our hearts," said Ruta Shah-Gordon, assistant vice president of campus life and internationalization.

In a written statement, Wagner President Dr. Richard Guarasci said, "Dear Members of the Wagner Community, It is my sad duty to share with you news of the death of Kelsey Justin Stevens, a member of the [senior] class. We have just learned from his mother that



Wagner College students try to comfort one another as they mourn the passing of their school mate.

Justin's body was found this afternoon in the East Bronx. Justin left campus yesterday afternoon for an appointment in Manhattan and had not returned.

"We do not have many more details at this moment, but will share as these become available. ... I ask that you offer your support to his family and friends and help them as best you can. A service to mourn and to celebrate his brief but wonderful life will be held later in the semester."

Guarasci told the Advance Tuesday night that as an orientation coordinator, Stevens oversaw 160 volunteers, who in turn helped 450 freshmen move onto the campus.

ALWAYS FRIENDLY

Stevens was always friendly and helpful to other students, Guarasci said, recalling, "He was not introverted.

"There is no indication of any troubles or issues he may have been dealing with," Guarasci added. "It is a shock to the whole campus."

Martinesi, the security director, said he last saw Stevens, happy and smiling, on Thursday.

"He was much-loved," said Wagner's Director of Communications Lee Manchester. "He was in students' hearts, not just on their schedules."

Manchester said the school will make grief counseling available to students.

Earlier Monday, close to 100 students and faculty gathered inside and outside Main Hall — where the theater is — to mourn Stevens and console each other. Many sobbed and wiped away tears upon hearing the news.

APPEARED IN 'RENT'

Stevens most recently played the role of Benny in "Rent" and was in the production "School for Lies." In 2011, he starred as Dr. Frank-N-Furter in Wagner's well-received production of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show." At the vigil, students played songs by Beyonce and from the musical "Rent" in Stevens' honor.

McCann noted that he and Stevens had dressed up a few times as famous couples for costume parties: Stevens as Beyonce, McCann as Lady Gaga. Another time, McCann dressed as Kim Kardashian and Stevens as Kanye West; McCann said Kardashian ac-

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— RUTA SHAH-GORDON, ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT OF CAMPUS LIFE AND INTERNATIONALIZATION, RECALLING KELSEY JUSTIN STEVENS

usually retweeted the photo of the two together.

"I know I speak for the rest of my class and the school. We know what a presence Justin was in our lives and I know what a presence he was in my life, especially. I don't know who's going to be the Beyonce to my Gaga. I know this is probably the saddest day of my life. I know that it's probably one of your saddest days as well," McCann told students Tuesday night.

Sabrina Slater, the school's former director of co-curricular programs, said, "You couldn't miss him or forget him, and even now thinking of him makes me smile.

"This was someone who literally spent their last days welcoming people to this campus, to this place, to this part of his life. It feels like a dream, well, a nightmare. It's so real that it's not."

Quoted in the Aug. 22 edition of The Wagnerian, the school's paper, Stevens advised new students: "Be open to new experiences and cherish the time you have here because it really does go by SUPER fast. Quicker than high school."

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