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IN MEMORIAM - JEFF BLUGRIND

A MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHER



Fellow Laderians,

By the time you read this, it will have been exactly two short weeks since my good friend's life ended, sadly by his own hand. I'm talking, of course, about Jeff Blugrind, Ladera's wonder kind. Not enough time has passed for me to get my head around this loss. I'm sure many, if not most, of you feel the same way.

Jeff lived in Aliso Viejo where he was also a member of the HOA Board of Director. But, as soon as he heard about the new planned community of Ladera Ranch, he sold his home, packed his belongings, resigned from the Aliso Viejo Board, and move here so he could be part of this grand experiment.

Saying Jeff was part of Ladera Ranch is a gross understatement of epic proportions. Even saying he was involved in everything in Ladera would be understating the facts. The truth is, Jeff set the pace and the standard that has become known throughout the country as Ladera Ranch. And, believe me, this is no exaggeration. Jeff was all that . . . and much more.

I called him the "Ubiquitous Jeff Blugrind" because everywhere I when, there he was, cutting one-liners that were truly funny, while looking at you with his patented cat-ate-the-canary grin of his. He knew everyone and everything. When I needed advice or direction on a given subject, Jeff was the first, and usually the last, person I called.

The sweet man who took his life on that sad day is not the Jeff Blugrind we all knew and loved. For a variety of reasons that are not important now, Jeff simply was not himself.

Jeff was so terribly insecure about how people felt about him but, the truth is, everyone loved him. I wish he had known that; I wish now that I had told him so.

I don't know how Ladera Ranch is going to get along without Jeff Blugrind. I suppose we'll muddle along through the haze for a little while and then we'll move on to better and greater things. After all, Ladera Ranch is overrun with amazing, brilliant, talented people and our greatest years are still ahead if us.

But the death of our dear friend is a real loss. I suggest we do something to ensure that, as people come and go, and families move in and our of our little piece of heaven on earth, the community will never forget one of our greatest trailblazers.

Bo Kelleher, one of Jeff's closest friends, wrote his eulogy, published on page 24. It's raw and from the heart. It brought tears to my eyes – again. I hope it makes you cry too because, without pain, there's no meaning in any of this.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Schmitt".

Jim Schmitt, Editor and Publisher

As Told by One of His Closest Friends

Remembering Jeff



by Bo Kelleher, Editor, Ladera Portal and Ladera Times Media Partner

On October 18, Jeff Blugrind took his own life. It's an incomprehensible act for anyone to consider, but especially difficult to comprehend given the love and respect that Jeff garnered from so many people, in so many areas of his life.



Bo Kelleher

The "why?" Behind any suicide is always complicated. It's made more difficult to those who knew Jeff as always being so positive and upbeat.

People will make suppositions and guesses as to what caused Jeff to think that suicide was the only option and, to a person, they will all be wrong.

In truth, only Jeff knew the answer, so to speculate or to judge is folly.

A normal obituary would list a person's accomplishments, but there aren't enough pages in the paper to list all of Jeff's.

He made every type-A overachiever in Ladera Ranch (you know who you are) jealous. He's garnered the cover of the *Ladera Times* and the *OC Register's Ladera Post* on numerous occasions and been covered in dozens and dozens of articles that chronicle his incredible impact on our community.

As I drove my son to school the day after Jeff's death, I was emotionally struck.

I see Jeff everywhere I go in Ladera Ranch. I see him

when I pass the Town Green, where he emceed most events and helped put on the annual menorah lighting at Hanukkah.

I see the light poles down the main streets, where holiday banners will soon hang that Jeff designed.

I see the electric carts that LARMAC uses around the community that Jeff advocated for during his seven years on the HOA board, more than any other resident.

I see him when I drive past the drop off area at Chaparral Elementary, where he volunteered tirelessly to help calm traffic (and parents) and keep kids safe.

I see him when I pass the lighted crosswalk on Sienna, knowing that he pushed the County for safer streets for us all.




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f Blugrind

I see him when I pass the many locations in Ladera Ranch where I helped Jeff film his Telly-award winning production, "Focus On: Ladera Ranch" (see photo on left).

I see him at Founders' Park where he was such a success factor in the many 4th of July celebrations and the Taste of Ladera.

Jeff was a friend of mine, so writing this is a difficult task. But I hope it honors him and helps others know my friend a little better.

Jeff and I met in 2004 through LaderaLife, and when I found it to be underwhelming, I joined with a few other residents to create what would later become LaderaPortal.com.

Jeff was one of the first people to register on the site and an advocate for improvements to our online community.

He was a non-voting director of LARMAC at the time, appointed by the board which hoped to groom him for a future leadership position. They had no idea at the time how big an impact he would have.

In those early days of our friendship, I had the pleasure of designing



Jeff's LARMAC campaign website and LaderaPortal endorsed his election to the board.

Jeff had previously been a director on the board of the Aliso Viejo Community Association (AVCA) before moving to Ladera Ranch.

He always had an insatiable desire to be involved, and to be at the center of things.

Jeff's father put it best when he joked during the eulogy at his son's funeral, "Jeff suffered from Center-of-Attention Deficit Disorder!" (*Editor's Note: The remark brought a roar from the more than 200 people who attended his funeral. If you were taking photos, Jeff would invariably mug it up in front of your lens, as in the photo above.*)

Jeff grew up in the San Fernando Valley with his brother Scott. Both of them were showmen from an

(continued on page 26)

JUST SOLD!

23 Kelly Lane, Ladera Ranch



What the Sellers had to say:

"What stands out the most, was Kasia's client service while the house was listed. Her approach was one of a tireless agent who provided five-star concierge services. She consistently went above and beyond any realtor we've worked with. We can't imagine what we'd have done without her in many situations. It was an absolute delight having her on our team and can't recommend her strongly enough."

Don and Jennifer - Ladera Ranch



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Goodbye Jeff, RIP!

(continued from page 25)
early age.

Scott tells of how the bedrooms in their childhood home shared a wall, and how Scott would be in his room, jumping around with a tennis racket for a guitar and rocking out while, in the next room, Jeff was imagining himself as a great DJ, with songs blaring competitively.

Scott would go on to become an actor, earning Emmy honors for a role on the NBC show Friends, and Jeff would go on to fulfill his dream of being a DJ, starting his business in March of 1981 and working Emcee, DJ, Audio, Video and Technical Producer gigs all around the country.

DJ-ing was Jeff's way of always being at the party. He worked gigs all over the valley, from the roller rink to bar mitzvahs and weddings.

He met his wife Danielle while spinning at a hotel bar. The two would later be married in that same hotel. They were married for 20 years.

He also met his best friend, Clark Chuka, while DJ-ing back in 1988. The two of them worked night clubs from Malibu to Magic Mountain and had quite the booming business with USC frat parties.

They continued working together throughout the years and were actively working on a show at Disneyland called, "Dancin' with Disney."

If you haven't seen it yet, it's worth a visit to see Jeff's genius in action. He co-wrote the script and, if you know Jeff's sense of humor and timing, you already know how great it is.

Jeff worked extensively in the TV industry, warming up audiences for various TV shows.

When a live audience was needed and a laugh track wouldn't do, Jeff was there, making audiences roll and keeping them entertained for the many hours that it took to film a sitcom.

Most recently, Jeff was working on the set of "Shake It Up!" for Disney. He also worked on Ant Farm and Jessie.

Jeff absolutely loved Disney and had been working with the company off and on since 1995.

Jeff was a work-at-home father who adored his daughter Rachel. He put in countless hours at her school, using his talent and connections to arrange visits from the USC marching band, actors from High School Musical and much more.

He was never satisfied with a small production. It always had to be a cut above.

Jeff was also a serious (notorious?) off-road enthusiast. If you saw him driving around in his Hummer H2, you may have noticed the winch and off-road tires, but you may not have noticed the extensive repairs that had to be done after Jeff



rolled the truck over several times careening down a sand hill at Pismo Beach, with Danielle and Rachel inside.

I had the pleasure of accompanying Jeff on a good number of off-road adventures.

We crossed the Mojave desert twice and took a trip to the Grand Canyon with kids.

Jeff was always eager to help out others. I recall one cold morning when Ladera Portal cofounder Brett Buchanan and I joined Jeff on a trip to the top of Saddleback mountain.

We discovered a couple of guys who managed to get their two-wheel drive pickup stuck in a place they never should have been.

Jeff hooked up his winch and rescued their less capable vehicle. That was kind of iconic for

how things went with Jeff: People in need + Jeff + Cool Technology = everything he did.

We have lost someone immensely special. There will never be another "Jeff Blugrind" in Ladera Ranch. He set the bar way too high.

We are without a husband, a father, a son, a brother, a friend, a neighbor, a civic leader.

We are missing the talents of a beloved emcee, TV host, video editor, and a dozen or more other incredible attributes and talents that I probably never knew about.

There are so many stories I could tell you, and that we could all tell each other about Jeff. Please do. Please tell them and honor and celebrate the life of Jeff Blugrind. He will be so dearly missed.

(Photos of Jeff continue on page 28)



Memories of Jeff Blugrind

