



### **Thomas Troxel**

Sometimes children experience a monumental event that forever changes who they are. Losing a parent at a young age is one of those experiences. It is hard to even describe how difficult it is for children to cope with such a loss, much less overcome the grief and go on to thrive.

This is Thomas Troxel's story. Tom's father was a well-known surgeon and a rising star in the local medical community. Incredibly, when Thomas was 11, his dad died suddenly from a brain aneurysm.

Thomas was the oldest of three children, and he immediately stepped up to shepherd his younger siblings through the shock and grieving experience. Unsurprisingly, enormous personal struggles and massive changes in his family dynamics resulted from their devastating loss. His mother, overcome with her own grief, struggled through the crisis with her own challenges. Tom showed extraordinary maturity and supported his family throughout their shared ordeal. In the years that followed, he continued to take a leadership role in his family, and found that he was happiest when serving others. He has emerged as an amazing individual who is kind, focused, caring, and more than willing to help others.

Tom is dedicated to community service, and acts as a mentor to his peers as it relates to taking the time to help others. Even before he learned about the term "civic virtue" in his Government class, Tom was living it by being active in his community. After winning the large school statewide football championship title, he felt it would be good for the team to celebrate their achievement by doing something positive for their less fortunate neighbors. He organized, coordinated and led his team to volunteer at a Habitat for Humanity project site, thus starting a new West football team tradition.

Tom is also tuned into the needs of youth who may be suffering through difficult circumstances. In an effort to help them, he has been collecting, packaging and delivering personal hygiene items for homeless teens at Covenant House monthly for more than three years. He truly cares for his peers who are struggling and going through trying times. As a young man, he understands the meaning of the word “empathy.”

In addition to his outstanding character, Tom is brilliant in math and science and does well in school. As a junior at West, he boasts a GPA of 4.66. Not content to just earn good grades and leave it at that, Tom has tutored neighborhood children struggling with math and science for years. He is willing to share his talent with those who need it.

Perhaps closest to Tom’s heart is a non-profit he founded last summer called “Not Alone: Alaska Kids Foundation.” The foundation’s goal is to help children cope with the loss of a parent. This, of course, is directly related to his own personal challenge. Tom’s vision of helping other going through a similar crisis is his motivation. He has wisdom and empathy that he can use to make a difference in these kids’ lives. He hopes to grow and strengthen his non-profit, and develop it into a far-reaching organization that can support many grieving children. But this is not where it will end with Tom, because he is always finding new ways to reach people. His mentors have no doubt that he will continue to touch others’ lives for the better.

Tom is on West High’s “We the People” National team. Due in part to his hard work and dedication, the team won state and will represent the State of Alaska at Nationals in Washington, D.C. next month. He has spent hundreds of hours with his team studying and preparing for both the state competition and now the national competition. Tom loves to learn and will use his work ethic, motivation and natural talents to make the world a better place. No one doubts this assertion.