

City's auction-house community mourns Jose Tavera

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Sean Kastner, president of Kastner Auctions, holds the urn containing the ashes of employee Jose Bernal Tavera.

Photograph by: Larry Wong , The Journal

Jose Bernal Tavera's energetic personality rubbed off on everyone who stepped inside Kastner Auctions. The temporary foreign worker was respected and admired by customers and employees alike.

Since his death from a heart attack at age 54 on Nov. 13, the auction community has come together in a showing of spirit that will ensure Mr. Tavera's family in Mexico is cared for into the future.

Connelly-McKinley Funeral Homes donated a casket for Mr. Tavera's funeral in Edmonton. The service was broadcast live online so family members in Mexico could view it.

To date, nearly \$9,000 has been collected for Mr. Tavera's wife, Miriam, and their three children in Leon, Mexico.

One Kastner customer donated a 1991 BMW that was auctioned. Another customer plans to give money to help Mr. Tavera's children further their education. All donations are going into a trust fund.

This Thursday, Kastner Auctions president Sean Kastner will travel to Mexico to give the family an urn containing Mr. Tavera's ashes. The trip is being paid for by Kastner, the auction firm and its CEO, David McLachlan.

Mr. Tavera spent only two years working at Kastner Auctions, but he was a special employee. His death was a shock, recalled customer Bernie Stinn. The day after Mr. Tavera died, it was Sean Kastner who delivered the news at the auction house, Stinn said.

"Sean was crying, his hands were shaking, and everyone was in shock," Stinn said. "There were not too many dry eyes in the place."

In an interview, Kastner described Mr. Tavera as "a principle-oriented person and an intuitive giver He was a selfless man with commendable characteristics that few people in the world possess. He was solely devoted to others."

Kastner fondly remembers one thing Mr. Tavera told him. "He said, 'You know, Sean, it doesn't matter what happens to me, as long as my kids don't have to endure what I did and are taken care of.' "

Back in 2008, Kastner Auctions had been looking abroad for workers when Mr. Tavera came to the company's attention. Kastner said that during his long-distance interview with Mr. Tavera, he learned of his aptitude for customer service.

"He was very gentle and composed over the phone."

That gentleness was obvious when Mr. Tavera came to work at Kastner Auctions in August 2008. As an inbound consignment manager, Mr. Tavera often worked seven days a week, including some 16-hour shifts.

Kastner said Mr. Tavera would always set aside his lunch or stop restocking the warehouse to help customers or other employees any way he could.

Javier Tavera said his older brother was always putting others' needs before his own. After their father died, Jose became the father figure of the family and main supporter of their mother.

Javier also remembers his brother's vow to escape poverty. "One night, Jose was in front of a lamp using scissors to cut cardboard (insoles) for the inside of his shoes. He said to me, 'Little brother, I don't want to be living this way all my life.' "

Decades later, Mr. Tavera came to Canada to help build a better life for his family back in Mexico. Each month, he sent more than \$2,400 of his earnings back home.

He wanted to ensure his children the education they deserved. His eldest son, Emilio, is gifted at math, and Mr. Tavera wanted the best for him.

"His son was the apple of his eye," Kastner said.

From Mexico, Javier Tavera said he will always remember his brother.

"He was my hero in all respects of life, in sports, and in the way he lived," Javier said.

"I'm going to ask Miriam if I can have the ashes in my hands, in my arms, and try to say goodbye."

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