

# CRASH THAT KILLED KOBE



A fan is consoled at a memorial for Kobe Bryant across from the Lakers' home arena on Monday.

The pilot of the helicopter was identified as Ara Zobayan. Peter and Claudia Lowry, owners of Group 3 Aviation in Los Angeles, said he previously worked there.

In a Facebook post, the couple said Zobayan came to their company in 1998 to learn to fly after taking a sightseeing flight

at the Grand Canyon and deciding he wanted to become a pilot.

"Ara worked hard in other businesses to save enough money to pay for training," they said. "Flying was his life's passion."

Also among the victims of Sunday's crash were Payton

Chester, a 13-year-old member of the basketball team, and her mother Sarah, Payton's grandmother Catherine George said.

Orange Coast College baseball coach John Altobelli, his wife Keri and their daughter Alyssa were also on board, said Tony Altobelli, the coach's brother.



Humberto Guevara and Ian Codio, both 12, and Jose Munguia, 13.

## Meeting that changed three LI boys forever

BY MICHAEL O'KEEFFE  
michael.okeeffe@newsday.com

When Ian Codio, Jose Munguia and Humberto Guevara learned that Kobe Bryant died Sunday in a helicopter crash near Calabasas, California, the seventh-graders at The De La Salle School in Freeport said it felt as if they had lost a close friend.

The middle school students interviewed Bryant at a Manhattan bookstore in March for Kidsday, but on Monday, they said he gave them more than just a story — the Los Angeles Lakers legend inspired them to work hard and pursue their passions.

"He's Kobe," said Jose, 13. "He is one of the coolest guys you'll ever meet."

Principal Jeanmarie Becker said Jose, along with Ian and Humberto, both 12, were chosen to interview Bryant at the Barnes & Noble in Union Square, where he was promoting his book, "The Wizenard Series: Training Camp," because of their love of sports.

"I started to play basketball because of him," Ian said. "He's the reason why I take basketball so seriously. He had such a good work ethic. I try to model my game after him."

De La Salle students come from poor, struggling families, Becker said, and the meeting with Bryant gave the boys — along with Alan Turcios, who no longer is a student at the school — a glimpse of what is

possible through hard work.

"I wish Kobe knew how much he touched their lives and the impact he had on them," Becker said.

As they traveled to Manhattan for the interview, the boys were so excited that they were bouncing off the walls of their Long Island Rail Road car, teacher Christina Buttigieg said. By the time the junior journalists were whisked into a private room at Barnes & Noble to interview Bryant, Ian was so nervous that he began hyperventilating.

Bryant made the boys feel comfortable as he talked about taking advantage of the opportunities life presents, overcoming challenges and trying to be a good father to his children.

"He was a really down-to-earth person," Humberto said.

When the interview ended, Ian whipped off the Lakers jersey he wore. Kobe had touched it, he said, and he wanted to preserve the moment.

The boys also said that for several days, they refused to wash the hands that shook the hand of the basketball great.

Meeting Bryant, said Becker and Buttigieg, will remain with the boys forever. Ian wrote Becker an email before school resumed in September telling her this was going to be his year, and that he would work harder than ever. Jose started exercising regularly and eating healthy food. Humberto, once a shy, quiet student, has become more assertive.