ALTAMONT - Haley R. Hilderbrand, 17, of Altamont, died Thursday, Aug. 18, 2005, at Mound Valley.

She was born June 10, 1988, in Parsons, to Randy D. Hilderbrand and Ronda R. (Ringle) Hilderbrand. She attended Meadow View School through the fourth grade and then moved to Altamont with her family. She attended Altamont Elementary School and Labette County High School, where she would have been a senior.

She was on the high school and cross country teams. She had also been on the yearbook staff since the seventh grade.

She was a member of the Church of the Nazarene in Parsons.

Survivors include her mother and step-father, Ronda and Mike Good of the home; father and step-mother, Randy and Laura Hilderbrand of Coffeyville; brother, Heath Hilderbrand of the home; two step-brothers, Alan Good of Lewisville, Colo., and Phillip Frihart of Coffeyville; three step-sisters, Monica Evans-Lombe of Overland Park, Alison Frihart of South Bend, Ind., and Leanne Frihart of Coffeyville; grandparents, Ervin and Pat Ringle of Parsons, Juanita Slutter of Stonewall, Okla., Sharon Mann of Coffeyville, Buck and Mary Hilderbrand of Udall, Celia Good of Pittsburg, and Paul McAnarney of Pratt; and great-grandparents, Bill and Margie Ringle of Parsons, Letha Hilderbrand of Edna, and Jim and Pearl Wilson of Chetopa.

Funeral services will be at 4:30 p.m. Monday, at the Parsons Municipal Auditorium with Pastor Mark Koch and Pastor Todd Luce officiating. Burial will be in Memorial Lawn Cemetery in Parsons.

The family will receive friends from 6 to 8 p.m. Sunday at the Forbes-Hoffman Funeral Home in Parsons. You may read the obituary and leave condolences to her family at the Forbes-Hoffman Funeral Home at www.forbeshoffman.com.

Arrangements are under the direction of the Forbes-Hoffman Funeral Home of Parsons.

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Altamont mourns the loss of teenager
By The Associated Press

ALTAMONT - A local teenager who was killed while having her picture taken with a Siberian tiger was remembered by classmates and teachers for her energy and "zeal for life," while two animal welfare groups demanded investigations into the attack.

Haley Hilderbrand, 17, was visiting the Lost Creek Animal Sanctuary on Thursday in Mound Valley, where, for years, area high school seniors have gone to have their class photos taken alongside the sanctuary's exotic fauna.

While the 7-year-old tiger was being restrained by the sanctuary's owner, Doug Billingsly, it turned and severely bit Hilderbrand, who later died of her wounds.

The tiger was killed and has been sent to Kansas State University for a necropsy.

Authorities said this was the first incident involving the sanctuary's animals since it opened in 1994 as a home to almost two dozen wild animals, including bears, lions, leopards and several species of tiger.

Wayne Pacelle, president and chief executive officer of the Humane Society of the United States, said state and federal officials should investigate.

"People are naturally fascinated by these wild and dangerous creatures, but that doesn't mean they should have direct access to these powerful and unpredictable animals," Pacelle said. "A spate of recent attacks demonstrates that these animals pose a threat to public safety and should only be handled by highly trained professionals in controlled environments at accredited zoos."

The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals went a step further, demanding that the U.S. Department of Agriculture yank Billingsly's exhibitor license to operate the sanctuary.

"Keeping animals in totally unnatural, cramped, substandard conditions isn't just inhumane, it's downright dangerous," said director Debbie Leahy.

USDA spokesman Darby Holladay said regulations require that exhibitors of big cats keep adequate distance or barriers between the animals and the viewing public and said an investigation is ongoing.

Billingsly declined to comment to the Parsons Sun and hasn't returned phone calls and e-mails from The Associated Press for comment.

Billingsly's neighbors said they haven't had problems with the animals and said Billingsly ran a good operation and always warned visitors about the animals' unpredictability.

Dean Fouts said his two daughters both had their senior pictures taken with the big cats.

"(Billingsly) has put a lot of time and work into it and I'd hate to see him lose his business," Fouts said.

The photographer, Gail Weldon, declined to comment Friday. She did tell the Parsons Sun that she has taken photos with the tigers before and never had any problems.
Hilderbrand's family has avoided talking to the media.

At Labette County High School, where student pictures including the tigers line the walls of the guidance office, crisis teams were set up to help students cope on the first day of school, which is Monday.

English teacher Catherine Dean, who had Hilderbrand in some of her classes and even used her as a baby sitter, said Hilderbrand often went to the sanctuary. She described the girl as a "good student" with "a real joy to have in class."

"She kind of had this zeal for life and she wanted to live it to the fullest," Dean said. "Anytime someone this young dies, it's horrible. I feel numb."

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Obituary

Haley R. Hilderbrand

ALTAMONT — Haley R. Hilderbrand, 17, of Altamont, died Thursday, Aug. 18, 2005, at Mound Valley.

She was born June 10, 1988, in Parsons, to Randy D. Hilderbrand and Ronda R. (Ringle) Hilderbrand. She attended Meadow View School through the fourth grade and then moved to Altamont with her family. She attended Altamont Elementary School and Labette County High School, where she would have been a senior.

She was on the high school and cross country teams. She had also been on the yearbook staff since the seventh grade.

She was a member of the Church of the Nazarene in Parsons.

Survivors include her mother and step-father, Ronda and Mike Good of the home; father and step-mother, Randy and Laura Hilderbrand of Coffeyville; brother, Heath Hilderbrand of the home; two step-brothers, Alan Good of Lewisville, Colo., and Phillip Frihart of Coffeyville; three step-sisters, Monica Evans-Lombe of Overland Park, Alison Frihart of South Bend, Ind., and Leanne Frihart of Coffeyville; grandparents, Ervin and Pat Ringle of Parsons, Juanita Slutter of Stonewall, Okla., Sharon Mann of Coffeyville, Buck and Mary Hilderbrand of Udall, Celia Good of Pittsburg, and Paul McAnarney of Pratt; and great-grandparents, Bill and Margie Ringle of Parsons, Letha Hilderbrand of Edna, and Jim and Pearl Wilson of Chetopa.

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Arrangements are under the direction of the Forbes-Hoffman Funeral Home of Parsons.
Mourn

Continued from front page

The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals went a step further, demanding that the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which Huling's facility is licensed to operate, modify the sanctuary.

"Keeping animals in small, unnatural, cramped, subhuman conditions isn't just sadism, it's downright dangerous," said executive director Debbie Leach.

USDA spokesman Darby Holladay said regulations require that exhibitors of big cats keep adequate distance or barriers between the animals and the viewing public and said an investigation is ongoing.

Huling's declined to comment to the Parma Sun and hasn't returned phone calls and e-mails from The Associated Press for comment.

Huling's neighbors said they haven't had problems with the animals and said Huling isn't a good operator and always worried about the animals' safety.

Dean Poole said he and his two daughters both had their senior pictures taken with the big cats.

"Huling's has put a lot of time and work into it and I'd hate to see him lose his business," Poole said.

The photographer, Gail Wahlin, declined to comment. She did say the Parma Sun has that she has taken photos with the tigers before and never had any problems.

Hilderbrand's family has invested talking to the media.

At LaBelle County High School, where student pictures including the tigers line the walls of the guidance office, crisis teams were set up to help students cope in the first day of school, which is Monday.

English teacher Catherine Deen, who had Hilderbrand in some of her classes and even invited her as a baby sitter, said Hilderbrand often went to the sanctuary. She described the girl as a "good student" with "a real heart for animals.

"The kind of had this real love for life and she wanted to live it to the fullest," Deen said.

"Anytime someone this young dies, it's horrible. I feel numb."