

# Parker CHRONICLE

## Nonprofit supports families through grief

By Ashley Dieterle

Published: 11.10.09

After the mid-air collision between Marine Corps Helicopter and a Coast Guard aircraft left nine people dead including one man from Parker, one non-profit organization is reaching out to the families who have lost their loved ones.

The accident happened on Oct. 29 when the helicopter collided with the cargo plane off a Southern California coast. First Lt. Thomas Claiborne of Parker was among those who lost their lives in the accident. But for the families left to cope with their loss, one non-profit organization can help. Air Craft Casualty Emotional Support Services, ACCESS, is available to provide immediate and long-term peer-to-peer bereavement counseling to families and friends affected by the mid-air collision over the Pacific Ocean.

ACCESS provides a unique and vital service for those who have lost loved ones in the air disaster by pairing up people dealing with the loss with people who have previously gone through a similar loss. The program pairs moms to moms, dads to dads and so on.

Heidi Snow, founder of ACCESS, began the organization after losing her fiancé on TWA Flight 800 in 1996. She said after the initial response teams disbanded, no one seemed to understand that grief persists long after the funeral and that the pain actually intensifies as the reality of the loss has set in. She founded ACCESS so that no one else would have to experience the loneliness and isolation she had felt.

"I needed to talk to someone who had been through a similar and sudden loss after my fiancé was killed on Flight 800 and I could not find the help I needed so I founded ACCESS," she said. "This way people would not have to go through this type of loss, feeling isolated, without the support of others who have been there before who can provide a comforting and compassionate ear."

Over 250 volunteers make up the peers involved in ACCESS who provided extra support. Snow said the volunteers are able to take their hard-earned first hand knowledge of grief and their training to provide care to others in a similar more recent situation.

"ACCESS has paired up hundreds of people affected by military, commercial, private and helicopter air disasters," Snow said.

For more information on ACCESS visit [www.accesshelp.org](http://www.accesshelp.org) or call the free help line at 877-227-6435.