

McCullough grad killed in auto accident

By **HEATH HIXSON**
Villager staff

Colleagues and friends of James V. Walker said Thursday that the 26-year-old former Woodlands resident and McCullough High School graduate was a rising star in the newspaper industry.

Walker, a former Eagle Scout, longtime Montgomery County Red Cross volunteer and newspaper reporter, died Wednesday in Mississippi from injuries caused by an automobile accident while driving to an interview with a family of a U.S. soldier recently killed in Iraq.

Walker was on assignment for The Clarion-Ledger newspaper in Jackson, Miss., the state's largest newspaper. Since January 2001, he was the paper's environment reporter but was recently switched to the higher-profile military affairs beat due to the war in Iraq.

"James was just a great, great young reporter," said Ronnie Agnew, Clarion-Ledger executive editor. "He had stardom written all over him. He was an extraordinary writer. He was a rising star in this industry."

Walker was broadsided by another vehicle after he attempted to re-enter the road from the shoulder of a highway west of Hazlehurst, Miss. He had stopped on the shoulder to look at a map. He was pronounced dead at the scene, according to a Clarion-Ledger report printed Thursday.

Walker was driving to a community in

southwest Mississippi to interview a deceased soldier's family for the newspaper. His sudden death stunned colleagues who shed tears in the newsroom as well as friends and family in The Woodlands, those close to him said.

"He was compassionate but certainly questioning, and he could be friends with Attila the Hun. I don't think he met anybody that he didn't like," said Jay Walker, James' father. "There was the teen-ager who was a very mature teen leader. There was the adult that went to college and applied himself. He knew that he was going to be a writer from the eighth grade."

James V. Walker was very active in the 777 Boy Scout Troop, sponsored by Trinity Episcopal Church. He was the troop's 16th Eagle Scout. He was also very active with the Montgomery County Red Cross and spent his teen-age years volunteering with the group.

He and a group of friends were the local leaders who helped start the local chapter of the Red Cross Basic Aid Training program. The program has helped teach safety techniques to thousands of local fourth-grade Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

"He was a real bright young man with a terrific future ahead of him. There are so many good things I could say about him," said Bob Cargo, Montgomery County Red Cross director. "He was always compassionate about what we wanted to do, the issues he was involved in. We are really going to miss him. He was a good friend."

James Walker graduated from McCullough High School, where he was also a varsity cross-country runner. He later graduated from Texas Tech University with a bachelor's degree in journalism and political science. He was editor of The University Daily student newspaper at Texas Tech.

He then briefly accepted a job with The Beaumont Enterprise and later moved to The Vicksburg Post in Vicksburg, Miss. After about a year in Vicksburg, he accepted a position with The Clarion-Ledger, his father said.

Co-workers said Walker was talented and passionate about his work as a reporter.

"He was a very, very promising fantastic reporter, very tenacious," said Marshall Ramsey, Clarion-Ledger editorial cartoonist who once worked for The Courier. "He loved working in Mississippi and for our newspaper. We are all very stunned. He was a sweet guy, too."

Walker leaves behind his wife Kelyn and his parents, Jay and Katrina, who are longtime residents of The Woodlands.

A memorial is scheduled Saturday at Rosemont Gardens in Jackson at 5 p.m. Visitation starts at 4:30 p.m. Rosemont Gardens is located at 3935 Interstate 55 South near Jackson and can be contacted at (601) 371-0009.

Jay Walker said the family might hold a service in The Woodlands for friends and family at a later date. He said messages of support could be sent by e-mail to walker@scoutpr.org.