

Christian Music Pioneer Dana Key Mourned

Christian music industry observers are expressing sadness upon hearing of the death of pioneer Dana Key, who with Eddie DeGarmo formed the first Christian group with a video broadcast on MTV.

Key died Sunday from a ruptured pulmonary embolism, according to his label, Ardent Records.

Key recorded a dozen albums as part of the Dove Award-winning duo DeGarmo & Key, and the pair wrote more than 40 Top 10 radio singles. Key founded ForeFront Records, and in 1995 helped launch the Christian rock Ardent Records and produced such artists as Big Tent Revival, Smalltown Poets and Skillet.

On his blog, Christian artist Todd Agnew wrote that Key signed him to a record contract, "recognizing something I didn't even see." "He is the reason most of you know me," Agnew said. "He was a husband and father. ... Dana was a mentor and role model to me. ... Dana was a man of God. Before he was a musician, he was a minister. And before he was a minister, he was God's child. He will be missed."

A descendant of Francis Scott Key, author of The Star-Spangled Banner, Key, a Memphis, Tenn., native pastored a small church in Cordova, Tenn., called the Love of Christ (TLC) Church.

"Dana Key remains one of the strongest influences in my life forever," wrote Pat Scholes, who with Key is one of the founders of Ardent Records. "... It is with earthy sadness that this chapter in God's unfolding story comes to a close with Dana's passing. But it is indeed in recognizing the divine design that Dana wrote about himself that gives me eternal hope and assurance that God has used, and still uses, this very special man's life to win many to Christ."

A memorial service was held Thursday at TLC Church.