

Walk for Liam to benefit child with rare leukemia

Step by step, bead by bead, Shoreham boy stays strong

BY MATT CALAMIA
mcalamia@tbrnewspapers.com

Liam McGuire's Beads of Courage necklace is a badge of honor of sorts.

The 7-year-old Miller Avenue Elementary School student has been diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia and documents his battle with the disease through the multicolored stones around his neck, with each bead representing a battle and a victory the young boy has overcome.

Yellow signifies a one-night hospital visit, of which Liam has had 83. Each of 23 red beads represents a blood or platelet transfusion. White means a dose of chemotherapy; Liam has 53 of those. In total, more than 600 beads make up his necklace.

Liam's father, Matt McGuire, said the family will continue to add on beads through November, when his son's most intensive treatment for Pre-B acute lymphoblastic leukemia concludes, although years of other treatments are ahead. Liam has

been receiving high doses of therapy since he was diagnosed Jan. 22.

"[Liam] is the definition of resilience," McGuire, a supervisor at a pharmaceutical chemistry lab, said in an email. He and his wife, Sara, are both Shoreham-Wading River High School graduates and live in Shoreham with Liam and their 4-year-old daughter, Kerrin.

Of his son, McGuire said, "He is always smiling and laughing. He inspires us. He is unaffected, truly amazing."

Liam's leukemia has been complicated due to an amplification on chromosome No. 21, which manifests in only 2 percent of all leukemia patients. Liam's type of leukemia is so rare that Stony Brook University Medical Center has never treated it before Liam.

The community has come to the aid of Liam through various fundraisers through the Friends 4 Liam Network. McGuire has also set up a Facebook account to

give its more than 4,000 "fans" updates on Liam's condition.

Shoreham-Wading River schools and the Natural Helpers, a peer support program in the district, have also played a part in fundraising and will hold a Walk for Liam Oct. 16, beginning at 9 am at the high school track.

All proceeds from the three-mile walk will go to the McGuire family. Admission is \$15 for adults and \$10 for children.

Mary Mitchell, a health teacher at Shoreham Wading River High School and the adviser for the Natural Helpers, said the idea of the walk began this past summer. "I was reading the Friends 4 Liam Facebook page [and] my heart was hurting," she said in an email. "I decided that it was my duty and obligation to help the family out as best as I can." The goal for the walk is \$10,000.

Principal Daniel Holtzman said he met Liam last May at the Lax Out Cancer game at the high school, which raised \$21,000 for McGuire as well as Kait Suarez,



Photo from Matt McGuire

Liam McGuire

a high school student who is also battling cancer. Holtzman said he was blown away by his positivity and strength. The Walk for Liam, which Holtzman will take part in, is another example of the community and high school supporting its members in their hour of need, he said.

McGuire said, "My reaction to it is hard to explain in words, other than humbled and speechless," and added that his wife felt

much the same. "This community is amazing, everybody. They have done much for us already and the continued support is greatly appreciated. We are truly thankful."

The financial support the community has given his family has allowed Sara to take leave from her job as a pediatric nurse practitioner, and stay home with Liam as he receives his intense treatment.

Liam, still too young to understand what a fundraiser is, was, even so, grateful and happy to hear his classmates are thinking of him. "We just told him about it," McGuire said. "Because he is still grasping the whole fundraiser concept, but as always, he had a big smile on his face and said 'Cool.' He asked if he could go, too."

Liam still has a battle ahead of him but his father said he's taking everything in stride.

"He tackles each day with a smile and never complains," McGuire said. "Of course there are side effects and issues that are too difficult to explain but he stays strong and just rolls with it."

empirenb.com

Experience banking
services designed with