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5K Walk at Maybury State Park on May 31 for pediatric brain tumor research

BY NATHAN MENOIAN • SPECIAL WRITER • MAY 23, 2008

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For the James family of Livonia, who lost their 5-year-old daughter, Leah, to a pediatric brain tumor in 2005, their wish is simple: That perhaps in the not to distant future, children diagnosed with brain tumors will be told there is some hope.

To expedite that hope, a 5K walk will be held at Maybury Park at 10 a.m. Saturday, May 31, raising funds for pediatric brain tumor research.

The group hosting the event is Leah's Happy Hearts. Karen James, Leah's mother, heads up the group, saying that funds raised will be used for more research and to help with their annual Christmas event for children with life-threatening illnesses at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor.

Leah was diagnosed with Diffused Pontine Brain Stem Glioma, for which James said there is no known cure. One-hundred children each year are diagnosed with this inoperable tumor, all with the same outcome. Annually, 2,300 youngsters are diagnosed with other types of brain tumors.

"I thought this event would be a memorable way for families to come together in the community and walk for a reason, in Leah's memory," James said. "We're calling it Happy Feet for Happy Hearts 5K Walk."

A Northville fire truck will be on hand for kids to see and learn about, and the fire department will be handing out hats and pencils. A clown will be giving away balloons to the children, and kids can get a temporary tattoo of Leah's Happy Heart logo.

"One reason I asked for a fire truck, was that Livonia firefighters took a liking to Leah after she was diagnosed. They took her to lunch just before she fell into a coma, and also made her an honorary member. Her casket was carried on one of their fire trucks," James said.

Leah's Happy Hearts is a nonprofit organization, and their board consists of 14 members.

Also at the event will be the 'Wall of Courage'. "I belong to several online support groups and contacted many of those families asking if they would allow me to post their child's picture," James said. "It is quite a thing to see."

Leah was known for always saying, "My heart is happy" and inspiring others to be happy. James said Leah was a perfectly healthy child until the age of 4, when to everyone's surprise she was diagnosed within a week of being taken sick with vomiting and experiencing pain at the back of her head.

Leah received radiation treatments at C.S. Mott's Children's Hospital at the University of Michigan.

"It was my faith in God that helped me through this," James said. "I could have gotten mad and walked away from Him, but I turned towards Him. I've also joined a Bible study. My friends have been so supportive and helpful to me as well."

Kylie James, Leah's sister, is 11-years old and a sixth grader at Northville Christian School. James said the school has been very helpful and supportive, encouraging everyone to participate in this upcoming



Leah Jones



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walk.

Charley's Deli Grille in Northville is donating sandwiches for the May 31 event. There also will be plenty of bottled water on hand, James said.

Nancy Hackett, a board member of Leah's Happy Hearts said, "Everyone on the board knew Leah, and this has become a labor of love for all of us."

Last year a silent auction was held to raise funds, and this year's walk will, according to James, help make people aware of how fast a pediatric brain tumor can take its toll.

"Our lives will never be the same, or feel whole," James said. "I appreciate every day and, more than ever, my daughter Kylie and my husband Phil."

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A \$6 park entrance fee is charged. The walk, about 3.2 miles, will be held in the park on paved trails, with early registration strongly encouraged, beginning at 8:30 a.m. - rain or shine.

Maybury State Park is located at 20145 Beck, between Seven and Eight-Mile Road.

Registration cost is \$20 for 18 and older, \$10 for 6- 17; 5 and under are free. All registrants will receive a T-shirt with Leah's Happy Hearts logo on it.

Online registration and pledge forms are available at www.leahshappyhearts.org. Those with pledges of \$100 or more will be entered into a drawing for Tiger baseball tickets, or a

Nintendo Wii.

in your voice

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