

Families of brain cancer victims raise money for research

by Audrey Dutton | Staff Writer

In a splash of purple, the Schlobohm family will cross the finish line on Sunday. Their 5K walk through Washington, D.C., will raise tens of thousands of dollars for brain cancer research.

This is the second year the Schlobohms are planning to don purple baseball caps and t-shirts for the charity race, in memory of 8-year-old Sydney Schlobohm, who had cornsilk blonde hair and liked to play soccer.

Nearly 200 runners and walkers will join the Schlobohms' "Soar for Sydney" team, during an annual fundraising event this weekend that includes a 5K and golf tournament.

"It's a bittersweet day. You'd rather not be there at all. But," her father Cord Schlobohm said, "it's a nice day to celebrate her, as well as a good cause."

Sydney Schlobohm died from a brain stem cancer in 2005, less than six months after the family learned she had a brain tumor. Her classmates at Burning Tree Elementary School in Bethesda wrote books for her and helped organize meals for the family that spring and summer, as Sydney Schlobohm went through radiation treatments at the National Institutes of Health.

After her death, the whole family joined a fundraising effort that has raised more than \$4 million toward cancer research since 1997.

"We're really frustrated because, over the years, there's less and less government money to research, so it has to be picked up privately," Cord Schlobohm said. The family hopes to hit the \$35,000 mark as a team this year.

The Cassidy & Pinkard Colliers Race for Hope, which benefits the Brain Tumor Society and Accelerate Brain Cancer Cure organizations, will draw an estimated 7,000 participants to Washington's Freedom Plaza on Sunday. The race raised more than \$1 million by Tuesday afternoon.

Golfers will get a fundraising head start on the runners, during a tournament at Blue Mash golf course in Laytonsville, on Friday. About 200 golfers are expected for the Golf for Hope tournament's third year.

The golf event started in memory of Caroline Peabody, who died in 2004 from brain cancer. After the 13-month-old was diagnosed with the illness, her parents Chris and Lisa Peabody, of Bethesda, learned about the Race for Hope. Lisa Peabody was reluctant to participate. "I thought, 'I can't go, I can't go and see all those people. My daughter is in the hospital dying,'" Lisa Peabody said.

Gazette.Net

But within four weeks, donors had given the Peabody team \$40,000 toward their participation in the fundraising effort.

Caroline Peabody died three days before the race, at 15 months old.

“The hardest part of seeing a sick child is that your instinct as a parent is to protect, and here is a case where you can’t protect,” Lisa Peabody said. “You’re helpless.”

But Peabody found comfort in throwing herself into the search for a cure for brain cancer, first by participating in the Race for Hope, and the next year, by co-founding a golf tournament with the family of 39-year-old brain cancer victim Jim Ronan.

Chris Peabody ran into Ronan’s cousin Tom Healy in line at a sporting goods store in Rockville, when Healy’s Race for Hope T-shirt caught Peabody’s attention. Peabody was thinking about starting a golf fundraiser, and it turned out that Tom Healy was the owner of Blue Mash Golf Course.

The debut tourney raised \$76,000 in May 2005. Last year, that amount grew to \$85,000. Nearly 19,000 people were diagnosed with brain and nervous system cancers in the U.S. last year, according to the American Cancer Society, and 12,820 died from the disease. In Maryland, 220 brain cancer patients died last year.

Brain and nervous system cancers make up about 22 percent of childhood cancers. Three out of four children will live five years after they are diagnosed. However, these survivors face organ malfunctions, secondary cancers or cognitive impairments — possible side effects of cancer treatment.

The organization Accelerate Brain Cancer Cure feeds money into research aimed at curing the disease. The group paid researchers more than \$5.2 million since 2001. The organization joins the Brain Tumor Society this year as a recipient of the money the Schlobohms and Peabodys will raise this weekend.

“That, for us, goes directly into research,” Laura Feinberg, the ABCC’s communications director said. Feinberg said more than 90 percent of its funds go toward research into brain cancer. Lisa Peabody will be watching her husband and nearly 50 golf teams from the sidelines on Friday; she is nine months pregnant with the couple’s fifth child.

“This has given us a way to help, to soothe that need,” she said of the tournament. “I can’t solve the world’s problems, but I can do this one thing.”