

Dimensions of Living

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Run for a worthy cause

Foundation's "Smiles for Stefani" 5K set Sunday, April 7

By MICHELLE CENTAMORE

The Smithtown Children's Foundation is sponsoring a "Smiles for Stefani" 5k Run/Walk Sunday, April 7 beginning at the Nesconset Gazebo at Nesconset Plaza. The event, which will include relay races, music, refreshments, as well as an awards ceremony, is in honor of Stefani Felber, a five-year-old little girl who was diagnosed with cancer at the young age of 10 months and has been battling for her life ever since with the support and love of her family and community.

Stefani Felber was born on April 1, 2008. She was the third child whose parents, Shannon and Hans Felber, welcomed to their family with love and pride. With an older sister, Arianna and brother, Benjamin, Stefani "was the last piece of the puzzle" in the Felber family, according to Ms. Felber. "She was the picture of perfection. She brought complete and utter joy to all of us with her angelic features and calming demeanor. I was in love from the moment she was placed in my arms," Ms. Felber said.

But less than one year later - February 5, 2009 - a gut instinct about their baby's deteriorating health found Mr. and Mrs. Felber at Schneider's Children's Hospital. "Around 10:30 p.m., we were told every parent's worst nightmare," said Ms. Felber. "Stefani had a brain tumor stretching from the 4th ventricle of her brain down through her brain stem." Doctors determined that the tumor, referred to as Diffuse Intrinsic Brain Stem Glioma/Upper Cervical Astrocytoma, was stage 2/3 Brain Cancer and was inoperable.

"The only way our baby would survive was through rounds of chemo," said Ms. Felber. The Felber family also treated Stefani with alternative medicine and therapies, such as acupuncture, chiropractic, organic-based foods, and natural remedies from Canada. In November of 2011, Stefani was declared "cancer-free" but the good news lasted only months, as the tumor returned in May of 2012.

As long as her tumor does not increase in size, Ms. Felber said that her daughter may avoid chemotherapy. She visits Memorial Sloan-Kettering in New York City every three months for a check-up and MRI of her brain. The family hopes that she will not have to endure more rounds of chemo and dreams of a day when their little girl will be cancer-free forever.

"Smiles for Stefani," established in 2009 by the Smithtown Children's Foundation, helps to raise



The spirit of five year old Stefani Felber will be celebrated at a Smithtown Children's Foundation "Smiles for Stefani" 5k Run/Walk Sunday, April 7 in Nesconset.

awareness for brain cancer and all pediatric cancers, as well as unite the community and bring to light the fact that other families also have children in need, according to Ms. Felber. "The Smithtown Children's Foundation is an amazing organization that has helped so many families like ourselves. Having the opportunity to share our story helps us to heal, keep the belief that Stefani will one day be cancer-free and hopefully gives other families like ours the hope we need to go through our daily lives."

The Smithtown Children's Foundation was formed by three members of the Smithtown community - Christine Fitzgerald, Kristy Jaegar and Christina Alcure - all friends of the Kaylee Rivers family.

Diagnosed in June, 2008 at age five, Kaylee Rivers sadly passed away in July, 2009, after battling stage 4 neuroblastoma, "forever changing the course of the lives of the Rivers family," according to Christine Fitzgerald, executive director of the Smithtown Children's Foundation. "It seems that we were fated to do this as when we introduced ourselves - we all had the same name - Christine, Christina and Kristy - and we later found ourselves finishing one another's sentences as if we'd known one another all of our lives," recalled Ms. Fitzgerald. The three women - united in cause and passion - formed the Smithtown Children's Foundation, achieving their

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Race held in honor of determined youngster

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Smithtown Children's Foundation, achieving their 501c3 not-for-profit status in December 2009.

The mission of the Smithtown Children's Foundation is to provide financial and emotional support to children and families within the Smithtown community by bridging family, friends, neighbors and local businesses to act as one in times of crisis.

"The Smithtown Children's Foundation is 100 percent volunteer-based," said Ms. Fitzgerald. "We couldn't do what we do without these people!" In addition to individual community members, volunteers include local school groups and businesses including the Smithtown Teacher's Association, DECA (an association of marketing students), Maureen's Kitchen, Bethpage Federal Credit Union, Mercedes-Benz of Smithtown, Towers Flowers in Nesconset, Swirls and Twirls Yogurt, and more. Through this combined effort, the Smithtown Children's Foundation can "assist the community on so many levels," said Ms. Fitzgerald, including being able to offer financial support to families through a number of special fundraising events.

Fundraising events enable the foundation to not only directly assist families in need but also to award several scholarships per year in memory of community members who have passed away. "We like to say that not only are we assisting local families in crisis and bringing the community together but through the fundraising efforts, which allows us to award the scholarships, we are memorializing loved ones and helping to heal hearts," said Ms. Fitzgerald. Each spring, said Ms. Fitzgerald, the Smithtown Children's Foundation meets with the families who represent the scholarships to choose the scholarship winners. "While we are sad that we are gathered for this as no one wants to be the family who is memorializing a loved one, at least the foundation can take pride in the knowledge that we are giving solace to these families and that we are helping them find something good to have come from their circumstance," she said.

Since its inception, the Smithtown Children's Foundation has expanded its efforts to assist individuals and families of all ages and circumstances in need, for example, community residents who have been forced from their home due

to financial difficulties or extraordinary events, such as a house fire. Ms. Fitzgerald explained that the Smithtown Children's Foundation's application process includes a nomination form whereby anyone with a specific need can seek their support. "So for families either so busy getting through their crisis with not enough hours in the day, or others feeling too proud to ask for help, this was a great way for the foundation to reach out to them directly" Ms. Fitzgerald said.

The Smithtown Children's Foundation is also dedicated to assuring that the students of the Smithtown community are geared with the resources they need to succeed and they work closely with their district's school social workers. In addition to helping to provide backpacks and school supplies to those students without, the organization supplies social workers with over 60 thanksgiving baskets and turkey certificates each November, as well as 50 certificates to needy families in December... "just to spread a little cheer," said Ms. Fitzgerald.

The Smithtown Children's Foundation hosts three annual signature events: Friends Fore the Smithtown Community 6th Annual Golf Outing at The Hamlet Golf & Country Club, Holiday Breakfast/Boutique hosted by Maureen's Kitchen and Kisses for Kaylee Dinner/Dance at The Watermill. The organization also hosts other "runs," such as Mike's Hike 4K Run, in memory of Michael Denaro, a teacher from Accomsett Elementary school who passed away suddenly over the spring break in 2011, leaving the school principal to explain to the teacher's second grade class why he would not be back. "In conjunction with the principal and some other teachers, we host this event in his memory as a way to give his students some positive memories of their beloved teacher," Ms. Fitzgerald explained. Part of the proceeds from that fundraiser go toward a science scholarship in the teacher's memory to graduating seniors at Smithtown High School East and West.

It is a goal of the Smithtown Children's Foundation to continue to enhance its efforts and ability to support those in need, as well as to set a positive example for other communities. "We will continue to find new partners to affiliate ourselves with that will allow us to be a better community, one that others will want to emulate," said Ms. Fitzgerald, adding that the

organization hopes to make other towns aware that with compassion and motivation, they too could assist families in need in their community in a similar way. "What a wonderful world if everyone had one another's backs?" she said.

Proceeds of the Smiles for Stefani 5k Run/Walk will benefit the Smithtown

Children's Foundation so that they may continue to assist local families in need. Check-in for the event will be at 7:30 a.m. The race starts at 9 a.m. and the family walk begins at 9:15 a.m. Pre-registration entrance fee,

which includes a tee shirt for the first 250 participants, is \$20 for a single runner/walker or \$25 on the day of the race. First, second and third prizes will be awarded in age categories from ten years old and older.

For more details of the event and to register, contact Christine Fitzgerald at the Smithtown Children's Foundation at (631) 584-9511 or visit www.branchbrookchildrensfoundation.com.

SMITHTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Commack Fort Salonga Hauppauge Kings Park Nesconset Smithtown Saint James
Village of the Branch Village of Head of the Harbor Village of Nissequoque

Upcoming Programs & Events

Ongoing thru November 16, 2013 Exhibit Showing: Smithtown ABC's: This Smithtown Historical Society exhibit focuses on the history of schools and schooling in the Smithtown area, since the 1700s. Highlights include mid-19th century children's clothing; student assignment books and writing samples from the 18th century; and many artifacts and photographs that reveal how learning and going to school have changed for youngsters over the past 300 years. **Caleb Smith House, 5 North Country Road, Smithtown** Admission is free, donations welcomed. For additional information call the Smithtown Historical Society (631) 265-6768

Monday, April 1st 7:30 p.m.

Smithtown Environs: Village of the Branch by Brad Harris. The 4th of 4 lectures in Smithtown Historical Society's Mondays in March Free Lecture Series, this talk focuses on the area of Smithtown called the Village of the Branch. Discover how it became an incorporated village. Hear why the wealthier citizens of Smithtown Branch opted to break away to form their own government & learn how it still affects the greater Town of Smithtown today. Join us in the Frank Brush Barn, 211 Middle Country Rd., Smithtown to learn more about this part of Smithtown. Admission is Free, Light Refreshments served. For more information, please call (631) 265-6768

Monday, April 8th 7:30 p.m. Obadiah Smith House: Book Signing & Discussion

Kings Park author Gail Hessel will lead an engaging discussion on The Obadiah Smith House on Monday, April 8th at 7:30 p.m. in the Frank Brush Barn. Following the talk she will sign copies of her recently published Smithtown Historical Society booklet of the same name. *Copies will be available for purchase at \$6.00 each.* * Please join us to learn more about this local historical treasure, its unique architectural structure, and the fascinating families who have called it home. Admission is free. Light Refreshments will be served. For more information, please call (631) 265-6768 *Proceeds from book sale go to the Obadiah Smith House fund.

Saturday & Sunday April 13th & 14th 10am - 4pm Art Market:

Smithtown Historical Society proudly hosts its 2nd Annual Art Market, hosting local artists who will showcase & sell their work. A portion of sales will go to benefit the Society in carrying out their mission of preserving & presenting the heritage of Smithtown. Admission is Free. Frank Brush Barn 211 Middle Country Rd., Smithtown. For more information, please contact (631) 265-6768

Sunday April 21st 11am - 5pm Come Alive Outside with Mazelis Landscaping

& the Smithtown Historical Society: Get unplugged from technology and enjoy the benefits of getting outside for recreation, relaxation, and good old-fashioned family fun. Plant a row in the Grow to Give garden, take a guided Nature Walk, go on a scavenger hunt, create or learn something new at an interactive outdoor activity station! FREE Admission, registration required. For more information or register call (631) 265-6768