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Spirit to 'live like Andrew' endures

Joe McDonough turns son's memory into aid, motivation for others

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ALAPOCAS -- Joe McDonough spends his days in his home office, poring over e-mails, jotting down notes on the large greaseboard on the wall, and constantly talking to families going through the same terrifying range of emotions that he has endured for the past 17 months.

The Andrew McDonough B+ Foundation has become his life's work, ever since his son, Andrew, died last summer from a devastating bout with septic shock caused by leukemia.

Andrew McDonough was 14 when he died last July, nearly six months after his diagnosis. Joe McDonough wants to make sure that Andrew's memory and message live on through the foundation he and his wife, Chris, created in his honor.

The foundation provides financial assistance for families of critically ill children; money for research to find a cure for leukemia and other blood-related cancers and to improve chemotherapy treatments; and a scholarship fund in Andrew's name at Salesianum School.

Andrew was midway through his freshman year at the school when he was diagnosed.

But perhaps the most important aspect of the foundation is contained in the Web site's title: "Live Like Andrew."

"Andrew enjoyed his life to the fullest," McDonough said. "We want to encourage people to live like he did, to have fun and make the most of each day."

Andrew McDonough was a budding soccer star at Salesianum, a top student who was liked by everyone. That was evident by the more than 1.4 million hits on the Caringbridge Web site provided for the family by A.I. duPont Hospital for Children, where Andrew spent his final six months.

People from all over the world, including professional athletes, left messages on the site.

Many noted how Andrew's fight against cancer inspired them to get a new perspective on their lives.

Chris McDonough always has called it "the magic of Andrew."

It's a spirit they hope to continue at the foundation's second annual 5K run/walk at 6:45 p.m. Thursday, beginning and ending at Salesianum.

"Andrew would be the kind of kid who would want to win the race," Joe McDonough said. "But once it was over, he would be shoving pizza in his mouth, throwing ice cubes at his buddies and having a great time. That's what we want the [5K] to be about."

Joe McDonough can smile at the thought of Andrew laughing it up with his friends, and he can remember all the good times they had together as a family. But he's still left with an empty feeling of knowing that Andrew isn't around anymore.

It's a feeling he doesn't want anyone else to go through.

That's why he tries to spread Andrew's message whenever he can, whether it's speaking to a local swimming club or at a high school graduation, or even attending a soccer tournament that Andrew would have participated in if he was alive.

And now, through the foundation, it's also by providing grants to parents going through the same life-threatening situation with their children.

Helping families fight cancer

The foundation has given out five scholarships to students attending Salesianum, and it has helped a few dozen other families who have children fighting cancer. Joe McDonough said the financial grants range from \$500 to \$1,000.

Stacy Moriarty, in Aurora, Colo., received a \$1,000 grant last December.

Her 11-year-old daughter, Kennedy Bougher, was diagnosed with bone cancer last June. Kennedy has gone through a year of intense chemotherapy and still has two more treatments left.

Moriarty said some of the injections that Kennedy receives cost \$3,600, and her insurance doesn't cover the entire expense.

Moriarty is a single mom with four kids, and stopped working once Kennedy was diagnosed.

Joe McDonough knows the feeling. He stopped working after Andrew was diagnosed in January 2007. He's still on leave from his full-time job at J.P. Morgan Chase while he devotes the majority of his time to the foundation.

"All of a sudden, you find out your child has cancer, and you have no income," Moriarty said. "You don't know what's going to happen to your child, or if you can keep your house, or how you're going to pay your mortgage. One day, you think everything is comfortable, and the next, your entire world is rocked."

It's not that the money McDonough sent will pay for much of Kennedy's treatment. But Moriarty said it's invaluable for the little expenses that add up quickly, the ones that often go unnoticed -- the co-

pays on medicine, the gas to get to and from the hospital in Denver, the cafeteria food at the hospital.

Moriarty has never met Joe McDonough. But she found out about the family by reading about Andrew on the Caringbridge Web site last spring after her daughter was diagnosed. She posted a message hoping for the best for Andrew while describing Kennedy's plight.

Joe McDonough answered her, and they have e-mailed back and forth ever since, with McDonough constantly asking about Kennedy's progress.

After Andrew passed away, Joe McDonough e-mailed Moriarty and told her he was starting a foundation, and that she should apply for a grant. A short time later, she received a check.

"He's such a great guy," Moriarty said. "Unfortunately, we're cancer parents, and it's not the kind of bond you can have with someone who hasn't been through it. He knows what we're going through, and he's willing to help, and that makes such a big difference."

Embracing Andrew's spirit

McDonough knows there are so many other families out there.

He would like to help them all, but he knows he can't. He would like to find a cure for cancer, but he knows he can't do that, either.

Still, McDonough knows he can make a difference by spreading the message that Andrew embodied throughout his life.

McDonough doesn't take this responsibility lightly. That's why, for the 5K this year, the foundation is giving prospective runners the choice of paying the entry fee, or skipping the fee by starting a team and raising money for the foundation.

As of Friday, more than 30 teams and 400 runners had signed up for the 5K, which is ahead of last year's pace, when more than 800 participated. The majority of those people showed up the day of the race.

"This feels so good because it's such a great cause," said Cathy Gladnick, a longtime family friend who helped organize the 5K. "You just like helping people like the McDonoughs."

When it's over, Joe McDonough hopes that people will be able to step back and look at their lives a little differently.

"It's amazing because people assume that adults are role models," McDonough said. "But Andrew, at 14 years old, was a great role model for everybody just by the way he lived his life. My son went from the soccer field to cardiac arrest in 48 hours, and he never left the hospital again.

"If your heart stops today, are you going to be happy with the way you've spent the last 48 hours?"
