

Portraits pay



Truth Photo By Kelli Yoder Jon Granzotto fixes the sign announcing why he and fellow Elkhart Central student, Kyle Walters are out on the corner of Johnson and Jackson selling postcards. The sale will raise money for teachers at Central to cover the medical bills of their son Payton, who was diagnosed with Leukemia three years ago. 80625 Author Unknown

Four-year-old Payton Starzyk loves soccer and baseball, Spider-Man and Batman, and wrestling with his dad. "Payton is all boy," said his dad, Steve Starzyk. "For the most part he's fairly normal." The part of Payton's young life that hasn't been normal, began when he was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL) at 18 months old. He's spent most of his life being treated with chemotherapy
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By Kelli Yoder
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"Payton is all boy," said his dad, Steve Starzyk. "For the most part he's fairly normal."

The part of Payton's young life that hasn't been normal, began when he was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL) at 18 months old. He's spent most of his life being treated with chemotherapy and radiation.

The chemotherapy will end in March, but there are still five more years of remission before Payton can be considered cured. According to his dad, he has a 60 to 80 percent chance of making it there without a relapse.

"We are very optimistic because he's been labeled as a rapid responder to the medication. He seems to be pretty strong," Steve said. "But of course there's no guarantee, so that puts us on edge."

Until 2013, Payton will be watched for signs that the cancer could be back. He'll need yearly spinal taps and trips to the emergency room whenever he has a fever above 101 degrees, among other precautions.

With a \$75,000 medical bill already accrued, those additional expenses are daunting.

"The medical bills are not close to being done," said Steve, chairman of the social studies department at Elkhart Central High School.

Staying afloat

Christine Wolfe, an art teacher at Elkhart Central, heard about the bill and wanted to help.

She met Steve when she needed a baby-sitter for her son, Alancin, who's about a year older than Payton. Steve said his wife, Cara, also a teacher at Central, was at home on maternity leave with their son Payton, and would be able to watch Alancin.

"We started a very small little day care," Steve said. "To keep ourselves afloat."

Within the next six months, Payton was diagnosed.

It's been about three years in remission and the entire family continues to be watchful. Payton has a 2-year-old sister, Kalia, and a 12-year-old brother, Matthew.

"There's no certainty and that's kind of a bummer," Wolfe said. She thought if money was raised, Steve could work less and be home with his son more.

She considered what she could do to help. One fleeting idea was to shave her head to raise funds. But Steve was a bigger fan of her second idea: selling postcards with portraits of Payton on them.

"We want to give them time together," Wolfe said.

When she sent out an e-mail to the faculty asking if they wanted to get involved, Steve was humbled and pleasantly surprised.

"It was really neat that another colleague would think of our family in that way," he said.

Painting for Payton

After the e-mail, the art faculty hopped on board and the planning began. Wolfe decided to expand the original idea and the event is now part of a not-for-profit fund-raising organization called Portraits for Patients.

This year, titled Portraits for Payton 2008, is the first year of what Wolfe hopes will be many similar events in the future.

"I just thought about the fact that if this does raise money, why stop there?" she said.

The event will include the sale of 3,000 postcards donated by Lithotone, each carrying one of three portraits of Payton. The cards will be sold from 1 to 7 p.m. today at three major intersections: Hively and Benham avenues; Cobblestone Boulevard and Bristol Street; and Jackson Boulevard and Johnson Street. Postcards will be given for any donation that's at least \$1.

The main event will take place Saturday. A silent auction will be held to sell portraits of Payton completed and donated by Elkhart Central art students and teachers. It will take place at The Lily Art Center at Greene and Berkey in Goshen at 7 p.m. A bake sale will be going on at the same time.

People who want to volunteer or make an additional donation can call 215-1644 or visit www.portraitsforpayton.org.

Portraits for Patients is also working with the NIBCO soccer fields to host a Payton Starzyk Soccer Tournament on Aug. 30.

Raising spirits

Steve was out Thursday and will be out again today, bringing cold drinks and to say thank you to those buying and selling postcards.

"I can't explain how humbled we are," he said. "It's just an awkward feeling to need help."

While any money that is raised will be greatly appreciated, Steve hopes the event will also serve to raise the spirits of his family.

"You don't go through life thinking you're going to need other people. When people step up unsolicited..."

Steve trailed off.

"I'm just in awe," he said.

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