

Be A Hero campaign aims to help the community's littlest fighters



By Brock Weir

In a room full of police officers, paramedics and firefighters, it was agreed that one of the smallest people in the room, young Lily Meagher, just might be the biggest hero.

Lily, the daughter of York Region paramedic Matt and Gillian Meagher, has certainly shown her mettle. Diagnosed with cancer at the age of two, she endured hundreds of treatments, including more than 50 surgeries and procedures to make it.

And make it she has, and she's now lending her smile to local First Responders to be the face of their 2019 'Be a Hero' campaign, benefiting the Pediatric Oncology Unit at Southlake Regional Health Centre.

Since its inception 15 years ago, the Be a Hero campaign has been dedicated to showing support for young people touched by cancer, having raised more than \$275,000 towards cancer research. This year, York Regional Police is teaming up with Central York Fire Services and York Region Paramedic Services, as well as York Region Transit to make this year's fundraising campaign bigger and better than ever.

This year's fundraising campaign will culminate next month on Saturday, April 6, at Upper Canada Mall for a big head-shaving event.

Lily and her family were joined at Wednesday's campaign launch at York Regional Police's Aurora Headquarters by members of all three Emergency Response groups, the Transit team, representatives from Southlake Regional Health Centre, the Southlake Foundation, the Aurora Lions Club and more.

Here, Matt underscored what it means for families like his to have cancer treatment available close to home.

'When my daughter Lily got diagnosed with cancer, it felt like a death sentence,' Matt shared, noting that when his sister received the same diagnoses of acute lymphoblastic leukemia at the same age she lost her battle the same week.

Following Lily's diagnosis, she underwent hundreds of treatments, 51 surgeries and procedures, and there were multiple times he and Gillian weren't sure she was going to make it through the night, but thanks to treatments at Toronto's SickKids Hospital, she made it.

'One thing you'll find out if you ever have treatment at SickKids, every appointment must be at 8 a.m.,' Matt continued, 'and they pretty much book 20 kids at 8 a.m. even though they know they are not going to [get in at that time]. If you show up at 9 a.m., there is a good chance you might miss out on your appointment. We had to leave two-and-a-half hours at 5 a.m. to make it down in the rush hour instead of going to Southlake.'

'My understanding is only ten years ago, Southlake got their pediatric oncology clinic and that clinic is not very well supported through the government. It is very much supported through donations, through POGO and donations through the Southlake Foundation. We can see it there that the staff and the nurses and the volunteers are incredible at everything they do.'

'In fact, you wouldn't believe how much the staff and the volunteers themselves purchase on their own: juice boxes, cookies,

granola bars ? every little thing you can think of. The lollipops, that is all the staff. That is them taking from their own money. Same with the toys. There is a lot of other things that Southlake needs for their clinic, and I think the money we can raise here through this raffle, these haircuts, the shaving of heads, can give us lots of tangible results within Southlake.?

Susan Mullin, President and CEO of the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation underscored the need to have services closer to home, noting her own journey with a young family member battling cancer.

?The fact that we are able to have the pediatric oncology clinic at Southlake where we can deliver leading-edge care close to home is really important for all of us,? said Ms. Mullin, adding a warm thanks to the Meagher family for sharing their story, and the First Responders for answering the call. Matt is right, we don't get funded for equipment needs at the hospital, which is surprising. Everything from IV poles to stretchers to beds to toys for kids relies on the community for support. It literally is everything, from the high-tech equipment that we need to purchase to the basics.

?It is important for the patient experience and it is also important for our staff to have the most up to date equipment and the Be a Hero Campaign will really help us make sure that our staff have the right tools in their hands to support families like yours?

For more information on the 2019 Be A Hero Campaign, visit yrp.ca/BeAHero.