

# Ryan's Newsletter



The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation  
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Children's Cancer Foundation

## Our Feature Story Robert DiMatteo

On August 12, 2009, thirteen year old Robert DiMatteo went to his doctor for a back-to-school checkup. The doctor said Robert needed two vaccines; one for Chicken Pox and the other for Hepatitis A. During the next two weeks Robert started having mild back pain followed by pain in his shoulder and upper arm. After regurgitating his breakfast one morning, he said he was feeling better. His parents assumed it was some sort of stomach bug. They were very wrong.

After thirty minutes, Robert's right arm went numb and he was unable to lift or bend it. He was unable to move and had great difficulty breathing. He was rushed to Nyack Hospital where he was intubated. Within a few hours he was transported to Maria Fareri Children's Hospital at Westchester County Medical Center. That evening Robert had his first MRI followed by a lumbar puncture. The next morning, Robert's family was given his diagnosis: "Acute Transverse Myelitis" - inflammation of the spinal cord. (Vaccinations are well known to carry a risk of the development of acute transverse myelitis). Symptoms develop rapidly over several hours to several weeks. Robert's spine was swollen from above C1 through C4/5 and he was now completely paralyzed from the neck down. He was administered a mix of drugs and steroids and he was placed on a ventilator. Robert's family found specialist Dr. Douglas Kerr from the John Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore, Maryland. Dr.

Kerr, together with doctors at Westchester Medical Center, formulated a plan for Robert's treatment. Robert's condition continued to worsen. One of his lungs collapsed and his heart was pausing up to six seconds between beats. He was placed on heart medication. Due to the high level of swelling in his spine (above C1 into the brain stem), the myelitis tried to attack his optic nerve.

On September 16, Robert was removed from the ventilator just two days before he was scheduled for a tracheotomy and feeding tube. After three more MRI's and finally being able to swallow, Robert was transported to Rusk Rehabilitation Center in New York City. Robert's weight dropped from 95 pounds to 78 pounds and his muscles had atrophied. At Rusk, Robert received Speech, Physical, and Occupational therapy. On October 2nd Robert moved his pinky finger on his left hand and soon after was able to move his left arm.

Six months after his arrival, Robert was discharged from Rusk on March 12, 2010. He continues his therapy at Helen Hayes Hospital and is in a program called Locomotor training which simulates walking and can restore muscle memory to his legs. So far Robert is responding well. Each day is a big challenge for Robert. His trunk is still weak but he is able to use a walker, with assistance. He is moving his legs on his own. The right side is still weak and his hands are still not fully functional and he uses a machine to move his hands.

It has been about one year since

Robert became ill. Doctors and therapists have a positive feeling about his recovery. It can take up to 2-3 years to recover from a spinal cord injury. Robert is doing well and looks forward to a positive future.

Ryan's Foundation helped the family obtain a stair lift for Robert so he can be transported safely up and down the stairs at his home. Stair lifts are not covered by insurance and are quite costly. Thank you for all of your generous donations. Without you, Robert's quality of life would not be the same.



Robert DiMatteo shown on  
his chair lift at home

# PEOPLE WHO GIVE BACK:

## CABLEVISION

A decade after Ryan journeyed on, his living spirit continues to shine on inspiring not only Ryan's Foundation's all volunteer team, but everyone that learns of his story and how his courageous spirit lives on improving the quality of life of children in our community battling life threatening illnesses in any way possible. While The Foundation has grown rapidly over the years by word of mouth, it's the dedication and continued efforts of local media resources, like Cablevision, that make it possible for this grass roots non-profit to continue to gain community support necessary to raise hope and funds needed to assist seriously ill local children and their families. While it is Cablevision's reporters and producers job to cover and deliver local news to thousands of viewers each day, Ryan's Foundation would like to thank the entire team for their continued efforts and coverage of OUR Foundation. It is appreciated that they always keep their viewers informed (not as just a topic of interest or news for the day); but a cause that is dear to them for many reasons. The number of supporters reached and hope that is raised through their coverage is PRICELESS. Public service media resources enables Ryan's Foundation, and all organizations like ours, to dedicate monies raised to the needs of the precious children we serve rather than advertising expenses. We're grateful they are a part of our family as we continue on our mission to improve the quality of life for kids and families in our community who need it most.

Kimberly Hart, freelance reporter and producer:

I became aware of the Ryan McElroy Foundation about 6 years ago after producing a segment for Cablevision News. I met with Chip McElroy and Steve Reverri at Waryas Park to get info about an up-coming fundraising event, something that I have done for numerous other organizations. Within the first minute of the interview, I realized how important this not-for-profit organization was. Unlike many not-for-profits, The Ryan McElroy Foundation was founded to help ALL sick children and their families in whatever way possible...with an ENTIRE CREW of volunteers. As I spoke with Chip, I could see, even through his emotion, how he was able to turn a horrific ordeal that he and his family endured into a positive movement. This was something that touched me because I could personally relate to an ordeal like this...I had a sister who died of AIDS; therefore I understand that there is no greater pain for a family than the loss of a young child. I was 9 years old when my sister Kelly Anne passed away at the tender age of 5 months (January 5, 1982); that was the day

I saw my own mother's heart slip away and, the first time, I saw my father cry. For the rest of my family's existence (every holiday, special event, wedding, birthday, reunion) there is always one member not present and a small unspoken void in the celebration. So for myself, the Ryan McElroy Foundation means a little bit of hope for those families fighting to save their loved ones, something my family did not have a chance to do.

In my eyes, the Ryan McElroy Foundation is very much a guardian angel to sick children and their families and it has been my privilege to promote this organization and to help in the little ways that I can.

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Donna Reyer, reporter and news anchor:

Being a reporter and news anchor for over 5 years, I've done probably hundreds of stories focused on not-for-profits, but one organization stands out among others: The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation. I knew from the beginning (with board members like Steve Reverri, George Busolt, Carl Merritt and Jen Paden, just to mention a few) that hearts were in the right place.

About 4 years ago, Steve Reverri introduced me to Chip McElroy. The first story I reported on was about a local elementary school that collected pocket change and donated all the money to the Foundation. Those school children were selfless in thinking of other children who weren't as fortunate; it really touched me. Now fast forward: I knew Ryan's Foundation was special not only because of the board, but also because of the beautiful children they help everyday. Kids like Mickey and Seamus just to name a couple. Two great kids helped by the Foundation.

Personally, I get so much joy out of helping in some small way. When I'm asked to report on a story, I jump at the chance. I get immense satisfaction knowing that I did some good spreading the word about a group of people truly dedicated for the right reason - for kids who deserve an opportunity to have a full and healthy life!! So for me it's a no-brainer!! Thank you so much for letting me be a part of the Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation. I look forward to more "feel good" stories in the future.

PLEASE BE SURE TO CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE:

[www.ryansfoundation.org](http://www.ryansfoundation.org)

Your EFT donations can be made online

"raising hope"



# About us



This issue of Ryan's Newsletter is being dedicated to the memory of Ryan McElroy who would have turned 17 on September 11, 2010. Ryan is what the Foundation is all about.

The death of a child is an enormous tragedy. The despair and pain that follow a child's death is thought to exceed all other bereavement experiences. The death of a child is always untimely and encompasses the loss of the anticipated future together. Parents are simply not supposed to outlive their children and no parent is prepared for a child's death. The parent-child bond is one of the most intense relationships and children are emotionally and biologically a part of their parents. Many parents who have lost a child feel that a part of them has died too. The length of a child's life does not determine the size of the loss. Parents are involved in the daily lives of their children and death changes every aspect of family life, often leaving enormous emptiness.

When a child dies, parents not only lose a child, but a link to grandchildren and an irreplaceable source of emotional and practical support. Parents grieve the loss of possibilities and all the hopes and dreams they had for their child. They grieve the potential that will never be realized and the experiences they will never share. When a child dies, a part of the future dies along with them. Parents report that they never really "get over" the death of a child, but rather learn to live with the loss.

The death of a child can force parents to rethink their priorities and reexamine the meaning of life. It may seem impossible to newly grieving parents, but parents do go on. Many parents create a legacy for their child and make their child's life, no matter how short, have meaning. A part of each child's legacy is that the changes he or she brings to a family will continue after the child's death.

The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation is an organization founded by Ryan's family and friends. Ryan lost his life to cancer just shy of his fifth birthday. It was Ryan's extraordinary bravery and determination that inspired the creation of the Foundation. It is a story of unconditional love, faith, and the power of not giving up despite the great pain and loss when Ryan journeyed on from this life. This is an inspiring example of ordinary people creating something extraordinary out of nothing more than heartfelt hope -- inspired by an amazing little boy with a courageous spirit and contagious smile. It is Ryan's legacy.

The Foundation's board members and volunteers have diverse backgrounds, but come together with one single mission: to raise funds to support the children living in our communities who are afflicted by diseases by improving the quality of life for them and their families while they courageously battle on. The board and volunteers of Ryan's Foundation proudly support the McElroy Family and the wonderful things they have done for families in need. Chip and Judy, along with their daughter Tralee, are truly inspirational in how they have turned their grief into something so positive. "Raising Hope" is their mission and we will continue to work hard to help other young warriors battle on.

Children show us new ways to love, new things to find joy in, and new ways look to at the world. The memories of joyful moments you spent with your child and the love you share will live on and always be a part of you.

God saw Ryan getting tired and a cure was not to be,  
so he put his arms around him and whispered, "Ryan come to me."

A lion's heart stopped beating, busy little hands at rest,  
God broke our hearts to prove to us he only takes the best.

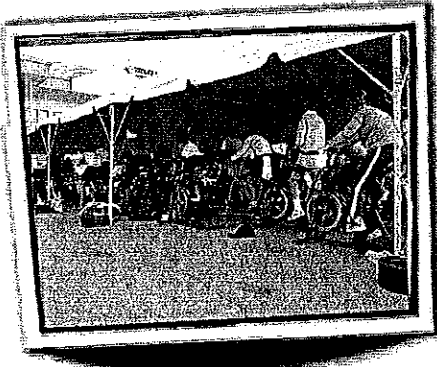
We know Ryan is with us each and every day,  
for the spirit of the "Baby Bull" will never go away.  
Never did we imagine from not being able to walk at all,  
that Ryan would walk into heaven standing oh so very tall.

— IN LOVING MEMORY OF RYAN MCELROY —



# UPCOMING EVENTS:

## RIDE TO RAISE HOPE SPIN-A- THON #2



September 11 is the date for the Ride to Raise Hope Spin-A-Thon at World Gym Brewster from 7am - 12pm where the music is loud and the energy is high!

The Event: For 5 hours individuals and team spinners will ride in support of the Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation. The day consists of five 45 minute spin sessions, with a 15 minute break in between, 45 bikes per session. Participants are encouraged to raise funds in support of their spin. Prizes will go to top team as well as top individual for raising money! Healthy Snacks and Drinks provided! \$25 donation per session (7am, 8am, 9am, 10am and 11am). You will receive an email confirmation of spin time based on availability. Childcare provided.

Contact for more information:

Michelle @ [mibourque@ryansfoundation.org](mailto:mibourque@ryansfoundation.org)

Gina @ [ginam@nycap.rr.com](mailto:ginam@nycap.rr.com)

Eleanor @ [Enurzia@ryansfoundation.org](mailto:Enurzia@ryansfoundation.org)

Sponsorships available—please email or call for more info!

\*\*Please note date change to September 11th from September 18th.

## ANNUAL FALL FESTIVAL TASTING EVENT



This year's Fall Festival Tasting Event will take place on October 28 from 6pm - 9pm. Ryan's Foundation, now along with Hospice of the Hudson Valley, will be holding this event for the 4th year at the beautiful Grandview in Poughkeepsie, NY. Tickets are \$40 in advance, \$350 for a pack of 10 or \$50 at the door. Johnny Dell, Joy's Vocal Stars and more will be there to entertain you. It's always a beautiful night at the very elegant Grandview. Last year's event attracted more than 600 people in the outdoor tent which featured epicurean delights from local restaurants paired with local wineries and microbreweries. Guests enjoyed browsing and shopping at the wide array of vendors booths. Folks were connecting, laughing, and truly enjoying themselves. One guest said, "I love this type of fundraiser after a long day at work; food and wine while helping kids. What could be better!"

Come on out and see for yourself what a fun night this is!

Visit our website or contact for tickets:

Steve Reverri @ [sreverri@optonline.net](mailto:sreverri@optonline.net)

Erin Reverri @ [MrsReverri@gmail.com](mailto:MrsReverri@gmail.com)

George Busolt @ [gbusolt@aol.com](mailto:gbusolt@aol.com)

\*\*Please note date change to October 28th from October 14th.

Wrestling Superstar Hacksaw Jim Duggan  
will be signing autographs  
on Saturday, September 25th  
from 1-4pm

This charity-benefit autograph signing will take place at  
Collector's Realm during the Annual Arlington Street Fair  
Raymond Avenue, Poughkeepsie, NY

All proceeds from the autograph signing will benefit  
The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation.

## 2010 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sept. 11 Annual Spin-a-Thon#2

7:00am-12:00pm Town Center  
Brewster, NY

Oct. 28 Annual Fall Festival

6:00pm-9:00pm The Grandview  
Poughkeepsie, NY

\*contact our Board members for more information or see our webpage:  
[www.ryansfoundation.org](http://www.ryansfoundation.org)

Ryan's Foundation reminds you of our EFT feature on our webpage. Please consider signing up for recurring EFT donations so that we may continue our mission of never having to say NO to a child in need.

[www.ryansfoundation.org](http://www.ryansfoundation.org)

### "JUST ONE PENNY"

What is just one penny? Most of us don't think it is all that much. We may even groan a little when we get pennies in our change. One of the benefits to a penny drive is that literally anyone can participate.

Everyone has a penny or even a handful of pennies. Children have lots of fun with this type of fundraiser, obtaining pennies for special projects. Setting a penny as a fundraising goal suddenly feels like one that everyone can easily reach. A penny drive is a simple fundraising project that can be well-organized with a small group of volunteers. Most importantly, finding donors will be easy as everyone has some of those extra pennies around the house, in their pockets and just about everywhere! Please consider having a penny drive at your school, business, or organization. Thank You!

Remember [GOODSEARCH.COM](http://GOODSEARCH.COM) & [GOODSHOP.COM](http://GOODSHOP.COM) when searching or shopping online. Sign in: [RYANSFOUNDATION](http://RYANSFOUNDATION) This is a great way to donate without having to take a penny from your pocket!

#### FROM THE EDITOR

Ryan's Newsletter is published by The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation, a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization, dedicated to helping children who battle childhood illnesses and cancer by providing support that improve the quality of life for them and their families.

#### E-MAIL

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And.....If you have a story you want us to know about, please contact our newsletter editor:

[sghavelka@gmail.com](mailto:sghavelka@gmail.com)



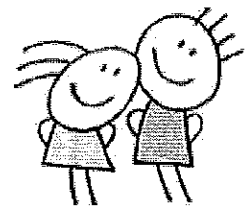
## GOOD NEWS CORNER

The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation received the \$1,000 Spirit of Dutchess Award! 19 individuals and 7 groups, who make our community a better place to live through volunteerism, were saluted at the "2010 Spirit of Dutchess County Awards" at the Poughkeepsie Grand Hotel. All nominations for individuals and groups were made online by members of the community.

The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation is happy to announce the "Scholarship of Hope" was presented to Mahopac graduate Karen Neary for her dedication to community involvement. Congratulations to Karen!

Donations were received from:

Stewart's Holiday Match Program  
Pre-Summer Bash at VFW on 9C  
Topical Biomedics gave 5% of their sales to the Foundation  
New Fairfield Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation  
North East Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation  
Danbury Physical & Rehabilitation, PC



Thank You for your donations made through our Newsletter.  
Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

# I want to help donation form



Enclosed is my gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone-day: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone-evening: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ My check is enclosed. (Make checks payable to: The Ryan Foundation.)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Charge my donation to: \_\_\_\_\_ Master Card \_\_\_\_\_ VISA \_\_\_\_\_ Discover  
Card #: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

MAIL COMPLETED FORM WITH YOUR CHECK TO:  
The Ryan McElroy Children's Cancer Foundation,  
198 Route 22 Atrium Building, Pawling, NY 12564

ALL DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

A \$100 contribution will cover transportation to a hospital. A \$250 contribution will pay for food or utilities. A \$500 contribution will pay for lodging or rent. A \$1,000 will pay for a mortgage or medicines.  
Please help and embrace the tiny things in life. Thank you.

