

A place where kids can be kids

Gilda's Club holds party for children affected by cancer

BY JAMES BRUGGERS • JBRUGGERS@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • OCTOBER 26, 2008

Patrick McSweeney, 9 years old and one year removed from 38 months of leukemia treatments, was just where he wanted to be yesterday — the “Noogiefest” at Gilda’s Club.

“They always have fun activities,” he said of the Halloween Party at the club, which offers support to cancer patients and their families at 633 Baxter Ave.

More than that, Patrick said, the club gives him a chance to spend time with other children in a similar situation. “They also know what it’s like,” he said.

The party, which included pumpkin decorating, a live animal show, an inflatable obstacle course and pizza, attracted between 150 and 200 people, said Joe Ferry, program director at the club.

The party was targeted toward children ages 3 to 15 who have any kind of a connection to cancer, including brothers and sisters, friends and parents.

“Most youth who are on a cancer journey feel they are doing it on their own,” Ferry said. “When they come here, it helps them feel not alone.”

Some of the children dressed as superheroes. One wore a black cape. A little girl came as a fairy with wings.



Patrick mother, Debbie McSweeney, said her son experienced a lot of complications and a grueling and painful treatment process. “He’s our hero,” she said.

She said she remains active with other families with children going through cancer treatment as a way to give something back, and to help bring additional meaning to her son’s struggle.

“You don’t want a child to go through what he went through and not want to make

something positive out of it," she said.

Patrick is doing well now, she added.

The origin of the party's name comes from Gilda Radner, the late comic actor from Saturday Night Live and the namesake for Gilda's Club. During some skits, co-star Bill Murray would give Radner a "noogie," a playful head rub.

This is the second year that the Louisville affiliate of Gilda's Club Worldwide has held the party. The club partnered with the Junior League of Louisville to put on the party.

Deborah Goldberg, whose 8-year-old son Noah was recently diagnosed with leukemia, was delighted to see him running and playing in the obstacle course.

"We've had bouts in and out of the hospital," she said.

Goldberg also brought Noah's three siblings and two of his friends.

"Kids have to remember to be kids," she said. "This is a great place to do that."

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