



KICKIN' CANCER

Hannah Henn and her Grandmother Marie Rossi.

Peters Township's Hannah Henn raises money to help Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

BY JENNIFER BROZAK

Each year, students from all across the country join forces as part of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's Student of the Year program, a philanthropic leadership competition that aims to collect donations to fight blood cancers.

This year, 17-year-old Hannah Henn of Peters Township is one of those select students.

Hannah, a senior at Oakland Catholic High School, is captain of Team Kickin' Cancer, one of 17 teams from the Pittsburgh area participating in the seven-week fundraising program. She has a diverse team of 10, which includes students and adults from various schools across Pittsburgh, as well as from Ohio and Indianapolis. The team's name is representative of Hannah's love of soccer—half of her LLS team's members are part of her extended soccer family.

Hannah first became involved with the LLS in 2017, after her mother invited her to walk with her at an LLS Light the Night event in memory of her grandmother, a breast cancer survivor who passed away in 2017 from an aggressive form of lymphoma.

After listening to stories of survivors at the Light the Night ceremony, Hannah decided to contribute to the cause, and began to raise money. That first year, she raised \$300 in memory of her grandmother.

"This cause is so special to me because it serves as a reminder of my grandma, who was the most selfless woman I have known—and an incredible cook," said Hannah. "It benefits not only people with cancer, but also their families and the rest of the community."

Student of the Year participants have a fundraising goal of \$10,000. Hannah's fundraising campaign officially kicks off on Feb. 5, but she already has fundraising plans in the works.

"I'm fortunate that my mother's company, PNC, matches gifts, so she'll be the first person I ask to support this cause—that way I start off with my first 'yes!'" said Henn.

"I don't want to set my sights low," Hannah adds, pointing out that Claire Katz, who was last year's top Student of the Year participant in Pittsburgh and is also Hannah's mentor, raised more than \$82,000. Last year, in the Pittsburgh area alone, program participants raised more than \$242,500.

Hannah became aware of the Student of the Year program after her mother, Denise Henn, encouraged her to apply. Denise joined the LLS in 2016 and serves as a co-captain of Team Addie in Pittsburgh, which is part of a larger Light the Night team from Nashville. The team was formed by actor and musician Chip

Esten and his wife Patty Puskar, whose daughter, Addie, was diagnosed with leukemia at 2-1/2 years old.

"I was touched and inspired by Chip and Patty's personal story," said Denise. "Addie is now 21, healthy and a member of the William and Mary women's soccer team. Hannah aspires to play soccer in college as well, which made Addie's story really hit home."

To the Henn family, the fight against cancer is a personal one. Denise is also a breast cancer survivor, and she has what she calls a "long family history" of different types of cancers.

"I've always felt strongly that it is important to give back. I'm so proud that Hannah has embraced this mission as well. It's so special for me to share this experience with her and witness her enthusiasm and compassion," said Denise Henn.

Denise said she chose to become involved with LLS because of its extensive reach.

"The fact is blood cancer research leads to treatment advances for other cancers and serious diseases. Also, LLS has funded more than 60 percent of the blood cancer therapies being used to treat other cancers," she said.

This year's fundraising efforts will be even more challenging because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Denise said that the students' fundraising efforts will help them gain "real life experiences" that will benefit them as they move past high school.

"The students that participate work extremely hard. To be successful, they need organizational and communication skills," said Denise. "They need to be innovative, particularly when they must do things remotely, and they must think strategically and be good time managers. They need to persevere in the face of adversity—they need to soldier on, even if they get a 'no.'"

Hannah, who plans to study biology and neurology in college, wants to continue volunteering with the LLS throughout college and her career. Currently working toward a Division 1 soccer scholarship, she is also part of the mentorship program at Oakland Catholic High School, which helps incoming freshman adjust to high school.

"Giving back to the community is something I hope to do for the rest of my life," Hannah said.

To donate or track Hannah's progress, you can visit her fundraising page from Feb. 5 to March 26 at events.lls.org/wpa/wpasoy21/hhenny. To learn more about the Student of the Year program, visit studentsoftheyear.org. ■