

His courage lives on

November, 2008

Foundation started to remember life of Princeton resident Patrick Comer

Former Princeton resident Patrick J. Comer died on March 9 from pancreatic cancer. His friends, co-workers and family wanted to do something in his memory that would honor Patrick's legacy – his courage, his compassion and willingness to help others. Comer was diagnosed with the disease in January 2006 at the age of 33. Throughout his 27-month battle with the disease, Comer displayed a strong spirit and an inordinate amount of courage, never questioning "why me," instead saying, "Why not me," said his dad, Jim Comer. Jim and his wife Cheryl live in Princeton.

To honor Patrick's legacy, Chris Fiacco, director of Mainstay Investments where Patrick last worked, and his wife Illisa Fiacco came up with the idea for a foundation to honor Patrick's memory. The foundation's mission is to promote a greater overall awareness of pancreatic cancer, as well as ease the tremendous emotional and financial burdens of both the individual and family faced with the disease, according to Chris Fiacco.

"Cheryl and I were devastated and living in the moment trying to support Patrick," said Comer. "The Fiaccos looked beyond the moment and wanted to do something to memorialize Patrick, so they started the foundation."

The 1st Annual Patrick Comer Courage Foundation Benefit Auction and Concert will be held at St. John's High School in Shrewsbury on Saturday, Nov. 22, from 7-11 p.m. Donation is \$50 per person. This casual evening will include hot and cold hors d'oeuvres and pastries, as well as a cash bar and a live band. Struck Café will do the catering, there is a silent auction with great items including weekend getaways, sports tickets, golf, and lots more, said Comer. Tickets are available on the website at www.comercourage.org.

"We want to support the families through the battle. They have enough on their plates without worrying about the financial issues," Comer said. "Our mission is to support families financially for medical bills, lodging, day care or travel expenses. That's our primary mission."

"Ultimately what I'd like to do is establish a Patrick Comer House, to give people a place to stay and not worry about the cost," Comer said. "It's so important when your loved one falls asleep that when they wake up a loved one is right there. Patrick always had a roomful of people. They had to stay in hotels or commute. Having gone through this we know how important it is for the person going through the battle to have their loved ones close by."

The foundation has already helped a Spencer man who has had a stem cell transplant from his brother. "He's worried about his bills mounting up, so we've made a contribution to him to help reduce the anxiety," said Comer. "These are the kinds of things we've both gone through (Jim and Cheryl). Both of us have battled cancer."

Comer fought prostate cancer and then throat cancer, and his wife was diagnosed with uterine cancer in 2001. "I'm a double survivor and my wife is a survivor. Our friends and family were there to support us," he said.

When they went through our personal battles with the disease, Patrick was so supportive, said Comer. In 2001, when Cheryl battled cancer, Patrick visited almost daily. But for Patrick it was different, said Comer. While his parents got good news through treatment, surgery and chemotherapy did not seem to help. "But each time he'd just say, 'What else can we do,'" Comer said. "We were prepared to help him battle his cancer, but he showed us courage that was above and beyond anything we expected."

Patrick got married in October 2007. "The wedding was Patrick's last opportunity to bring family and friends together. He partied the night before and had a wonderful time at his wedding. But things started to go downhill after that," Comer said. "In December he was admitted to Mass General Hospital and doctors there found the cancer had spread. He never fully recovered after that."

Patrick attended Thomas Prince School, skied at Wachusett Mountain, and played on the Pop Warner football team. He went on to St. John's High School and graduated from Assumption College.

"Patrick turned out great and we want to offer some of Worcester's minority groups the opportunity to go to St. John's," Comer said. That goal is another part of the foundation. "I support the school 200 percent. I know what kind of kids they turn out," Comer said. Right now the scholarship is restricted to students from the Nativity School in Worcester that the Jesuits and Holy Cross started for kids in grades six, seven and eight, he said. Patrick went on to graduate from Assumption College in 1994 and held various management positions in financial sales. His last job was as regional vice president of Mainstay Investments, a division of New York Life.

Patrick was an avid skier, golfer, sailor, sport fisherman, skeet shooter and enjoyed motor sports. He enjoyed baseball, especially watching the Boston Red Sox and Cleveland Indians and NFL football, and he attended many Patriots and Cleveland Browns games, said Comer.

On Dec. 8, Comer will go to Florida, where an award named after Patrick will be presented at Mainstay's national meeting. "It will be given to the person in the company who best exemplifies Patrick's qualities and determination," Comer said.

Comer said other events are being planned, including an event at Wachusett Mountain in February, and May golf event at Pleasant Valley.

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