

Local fundraisers assist Macomb Township fifth grader's family



Collin Stempniewski, age 11, is in remission from leukemia but suffers from a form of epilepsy that causes him to have seizures. Students at Ojibwa Elementary School in Macomb Township, where Collin attends school, held a Penny Wars competition to raise money for his necessary surgery. Submitted photo

By Nicole Tuttle, For **The Macomb Daily**

Posted: 10/09/15, 6:20 PM EDT | Updated: 2 days ago



Collin Stempniewski, a fifth grader at Ojibwa Elementary School in Macomb Township, will travel to Colorado for surgery due to the seizures he endures. Ojibwa students recently held a fundraiser to help pay for the trip. Submitted photo

Eleven-year-old Collin Stempniewski of Macomb Township has been through leukemia and now suffers from epileptic seizures.

He isn't known to complain, however, as illness is the only normal he knows according to his mother, Kathleen Stempniewski.

“He is such a trooper. He never complains. He always has a smile on his face. All he knows is what sick feels like. He has always been sick since he was two and a half. He doesn’t know any different,” Kathleen Stempniewski said.

At age two and a half, Collin stopped walking and suffered pain in one leg. A visit to a pediatrician garnered the initial diagnosis of a spider bite, but two weeks later the pain had spread to both of Collin’s legs. Another visit to a pediatrician and bloodwork revealed the diagnosis of leukemia.

He was treated at St. John Providence Van Elslander Cancer Center for three and a half years before he went into remission.

But just as the family began to breathe easier, parents Greg and Kathleen Stempniewski noticed Collin had developed the new and perplexing symptom of unusual hand movements. He began to suffer from four different types of seizures, said Corinne Ziemba, Collin’s aunt.

Kathleen Stempniewski said the seizures grew more frequent and began to include drop seizures, necessitating a helmet for Collin and a wheelchair at school. The diagnosis was a form of epilepsy called Lennox Gastaut Syndrome. According to Ziemba, three different hospitals recommended surgery, and Collin will get it at Children’s Hospital in Denver, Colo.

In July the Stempniewski family took a trip to Colorado for Collin’s surgical evaluation and testing. They plan to return to Colorado so Collin can have surgery on Oct. 20.

Kathleen said although the surgery may not bring about a complete cure for the seizures, it should improve Collin’s quality of life.

Although the family has health insurance, bills for things such as medications add up each month.

“I work two days per week. We have gone through rough spots financial wise,” she said.

At Ojibwa Elementary School in Macomb Township, Collin has a shortened school day and the assistance of two paraprofessionals.

Ojibwa PTO President Michelle Genord said students have been making a contribution to help the boy’s family through Penny Wars. From Oct. 7-9, students put money in one of two different contribution jars: One for Michigan State and one for the University of Michigan to honor Collin’s love of sports.

Students can contribute to their favorite team’s jar during lunches, but all proceeds will go to the Stempniewski family, according to Genord.

The organization Relentless Detroit has also selected Collin as a beneficiary of a powerlifting meet in November. The Relentless Detroit Foundation was created in collaboration with Detroit Barbell and Kirby Church to raise money, awareness and support for families with children diagnosed with illnesses, according to its website.

The foundation raises the majority of its money to assist families by hosting a yearly powerlifting meet, and donations can be made via the website at relentlessdetroit.com.

A fundraiser held for Collin at Tina’s Country House in Macomb Township on Oct. 4 raised over \$28,000, according to Ziemba. From the money raised at this event, the family plans to obtain a video system that allows them to watch Collin from every room of their home, as his seizures often come with no warning.