

# MACOMB DAILY

## Chippewa Valley students help family coping with cancer



Chippewa Valley High School played host to a gift giving party for the Richard family on Dec. 20, courtesy of students in yearbook and the Optimist Club. Pictured are back row, clockwise from left, Patrick and Daniela Richard and their children, Gabriel and Angela. SUBMITTED PHOTO

*By Nicole Tuttle, For The Macomb Daily*

POSTED: 12/26/17, 5:02 PM EST | UPDATED: 1 WEEK AGO

With bills piling up, her son continuing to suffer from the effects of a cancerous brain tumor, and the holidays coming up, Daniela Richard needed a miracle.

Local angels were available to provide one.

Patrick and Daniela Richard moved to Macomb Township in August with their children Gabe, 8, and their daughter Allie, 5. In March 2015, an MRI at Children's Hospital of Michigan revealed Gabe had a brain tumor, according to Daniela Richard. The tumor was surgically removed. However the location of the root made it impossible for it to be completely operable, making growth control the primary option.

"There is no cure for Gabe's cancer," Richard said.

"The goal is simply to make it stop growing. The root is too deep right now, and the neurosurgeon can't try to pull it out, there would be too much damage to the brain. Radiation is a very last resort because the tumor is very deep, again, in the brain."

Currently, Gabe takes as many as 23 pills per day, has had five surgeries, has been on chemotherapy almost nonstop for almost three years and was recently removed from a clinical trial due to an infection, his mother said.

It is hoped that the infection will be gone by March so chemotherapy can resume and another surgery can potentially be prepared for.

"Gabe was in the hospital from mid-October almost the whole month of November," Richard said.

Gabe's health is currently stagnate to worse. The only reason he is home is doctors did not want him to pick up another infection.

Although the family has health insurance, mounting costs conflicted with the need for time off to assist Gabe. Patrick Richard retired early from the Macomb County Sheriff's Office in 2016, and

Daniela Richard is a teacher who hopes to conclude her Family and Medical Leave Act time in January.

Daniela Richard said Angels of Hope assisted the family in 2016. Angels of Hope is a family cancer foundation with a signature program to support families with children in Michigan in areas including rent, mortgage, auto repair, home repair, utility payments, grocery and fuel gift cards.

The organization also has a holiday program in which it organizes Christmas packages for families in need, provided by contributors.

Daniela Richard said this past November, she found herself with mounting bills in addition to Christmas needs. Being off of work, she knew she was dealing with a financial issue as well as a sick child. She picked up the phone and called Angels of Hope.

“Again in November I was sobbing. The first thing out of my mouth was, ‘Help me please,’ because I was late on all of my bills. And they have done amazing things,” Daniela Richard said.

Angels of Hope assisted in paying past due bills. For the holiday needs, Angels of Hope paired the Richard family with the students of Chippewa Valley High School teacher Rebecca Kiel. The fact that Daniela Richard once worked in Chippewa Valley Schools was a coincidence in the pairing, according to Kiel.

Kiel is a club advisor to the Chippewa Valley High School Optimist Club in addition to teaching yearbook and graphic design. The Optimist Club has previously adopted Angels of Hope families, Kiel said.

Between yearbook and the Optimist Club, there is a total of 60 students, according to Kiel.

“I got the name literally the day before we left for Thanksgiving, it took a little under a month to get it together,” Kiel said.

The students and Kiel sought donations from family, friends and students. The students also sought donations outside of businesses in much the same way as the Salvation Army does with the Red Kettle approach, according to Kiel. Fundraising concluded on Dec. 15 with a total of \$2,150 raised.

Daniela Richard said she learned Chippewa Valley High School would be assisting her family through Angels of Hope when she was contacted by Kiel. Kiel and Daniela Richard determined that on Dec. 20, the Richard family would come to Chippewa Valley High School in

Clinton Township for a gift-giving event, including decorations, Santa, gifts and more.

“I teach high school also and she teaches high school. I said, ‘Your kids are doing all this work, I want Gabe and Allie to open the gifts in front of your students, they should see my kids reactions.’ They put their heart and soul into this and have helped me in a way they have no concept of,” Richard said.

On Dec. 20, the Chippewa Valley High School auditorium was filled with students and staff for the after-school event.

The event was a surprise to Gabe and Allie, helpful not only in providing holiday gifts, but also in alleviating some of Gabe’s depression, Richard said.

“She gave us gift cards to Kroger. Like I said, I had no idea it was coming. That was the best Christmas gift for me and my husband, I can’t begin to explain,” Richard said.

*Nicole Tuttle is a freelance reporter for The Macomb Daily.*