

## LOCAL NEWS

# Fundraiser aids camp for kids with heart, lung problems

Dragonfly enables children to enjoy the experience without feeling self-conscious.

By Riley Yates  
OF THE MORNING CALL

Ten-year-old Darby Hetrick had never gone swimming before.

She'd never spent the night away from her parents, except when she was in a hospital. She'd never gone camping, except once in the backyard of her Upper Bucks home.

That changed last year, when Darby, despite a life-threatening heart and lung condition, was able to enjoy one of the most American of experiences: summer camp.

"She talks about the campfire. 'We'd put a log in the fire and tell a story,'" said her mother, Christi Hetrick, a graphic designer who lives in Richland Township. "They got to do things they can't do at home; they're so used to having their parents hovering over them all the time."

On Saturday, Christi Hetrick hosted a fundraising tournament at Locust Valley Golf Club in Upper Saucon Township for a camp serving children who have received a heart or lung transplant or suffer from pulmonary hypertension, like Darby, now 11 and going into sixth grade at Strayer Middle School in Richland Township.



KEVIN MINGORA / THE MORNING CALL

Darby Hetrick II, of Quakertown (left), who has pulmonary hypertension, and Dragonfly Heart Camp founder Rhonda Cataldo and daughter Sarah, II, of Chestertown, Md., who has had a heart transplant, at a fundraiser at Locust Valley Golf Club in Upper Saucon Township. Darby's mother Christi organized the outing to benefit the camp for children with heart or lung conditions.

Dragonfly Heart Camp, which opened last year, is billed as the first in the country designed to accommodate children with serious cardiopulmonary conditions.

Medical staff from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia volunteer in the week away from home for kids who must take medicine daily to live and whose health needs are 24/7.

The camp is on the eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay in Worton, Md., and happens solely because of fundraising. It offers boating, nature walks, arts and crafts, volleyball and other staples of the camping experience.

It was in the bay last July that Darby got her first chance to swim, the pump that provides medicine to her body atop the head of a Children's Hospital doc-

tor.

"Her smile was just ear to ear," said Christi Hetrick.

Three years ago in July, Sarah Cataldo received a heart transplant on her eighth birthday from Jamal Pongracz, a 7-year-old Allentown boy who died after he fell from the roof of a house next to his.

Her mother, Rhonda Cataldo of Chestertown, Md., is the founder of the camp. She said bringing together kids who suffer from similar ailments allows them to avoid the singled-out feeling they sometimes face.

Sarah, her mother said, could wear a bathing suit and not be afraid of her transplant scar being the center of attention. Medicine time is for everyone, and activities are designed with children's health needs in mind.

But talking about her experience, Darby Hetrick sounded like any kid describing summer camp. The ride on a zip line was scary, but exciting. The swimming was fun, and there was lots of other stuff to do, she said.

Saying goodbye was difficult as each camper shared their memories.

"That was the saddest campfire of my life, because we were leaving the next day," Darby said.

*This year's camp is expected to serve 20 to 25 children from July 27 to Aug. 1. To help, contact Rhonda Cataldo at 443-480-9578 or Director@DragonflyHeartCamp.org.*