



## HINSDALE WIGNETTES

# One good act begets another at teen fundraiser

When Megan Pelino of Hinsdale signed up for the Julie Fbudy Sports Leadership Academy, she never dreamed the weeklong camp would open doors she didn't know existed.

"There was a lot about soccer, but more about leadership and developing yourself," Pelino said. "I learned a lot about myself."

She also learned about Jim MacLaren, a former college football player who lost a leg in an accident but went on to compete in the Ironman Triathlon. He was struck again while riding his bike and became a quadriplegic. Instead of giving up, MacLaren started the Choose Living Foundation to inspire and help others.

Pelino took MacLaren's story to heart, but didn't feel the full impact of his message until she saw an interview on "Larry King Live." During the segment, MacLaren mentioned Alex Hermstad, a 14-year-old Iowa teen who remains immobile and on a ventilator after a mysterious illness struck her in spring 2005.

"The model of the leadership camp was choose to matter," Pelino said. "They encouraged us to find a cause and follow up. I decided to help Alex, not as a project I had to do, but because I wanted to."

On the Choose Living Foundation Web site, Pelino found the link to Alex's page on CaringBridge, a non-profit Web service that connects family and friends during a critical illness. She donated \$50 of her own money, wrote the family an e-mail and received a reply from Alex's twin sister Jaci.

Feeling moved to do more, Pelino, a freshman at Nazareth Academy in LaGrange Park, decided to forego gifts for her 14th birthday and ask for donations instead.

"I raised \$300 in contributions from family and friends," Pelino said. "It felt good to get that much money so I thought I should do a big fundraiser."

Pelino received permission to hold a collection drive in front of Kramer Foods for four hours on a Saturday. Over lunch, Pelino and her helpers — mom Carol, sister Kathryn and friend

Ryann Javois — counted about \$700 in donations, bringing the total from the birthday party and fundraiser to just over \$1000.

"We got excited and started talking really loud in the restaurant," Pelino said.

That's when the unexpected happened. A stranger asked what all the excitement was about. Pelino recounted Alex's story and discovered the woman also had a family member with a previously undiagnosed disease.

Right then and there, she pulled out her checkbook and matched the total amount raised.

"I'm still amazed by the whole experience," Pelino said. "The real message is one person can make a difference. I've always heard this kind of story, but now I know it's true."



**Marianne Cortopassi**

### Hats off to scholar

Muscular dystrophy hasn't stopped Kushal Parikh of Hinsdale from pursuing his goals. A 2007 Hinsdale South High School graduate and National Honor Society member, Parikh was recently honored by the Women's Board of the United Cerebral Palsy Association of Greater Chicago for his positive attitude, determination and academic success.

Parikh was named the Women's Board 2007 Scholar and the recipient of an Assistive Technology Scholarship at UCP's annual Gambol fundraiser in October. He uses a laptop computer with word-prediction software to help reduce typing fatigue and credits assistive technology with giving him greater independence in his studies.

"Everyone has disabilities of some sort, but they do not make people weak," Parikh said. "They allow people to mature."

A freshman at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Parikh is a volunteer with the Muscular Dystrophy Association and enjoys mentoring and encouraging children diagnosed with the condition.

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