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Brothers' fundraising helps bring camps to kids

Vaughan

Dec 23, 2007 09:11 PM

Ride for Karen organizers help hospital experience

By: Michael Power

Ever go camping at Christmas?

Children at Sick Kids Hospital are getting a chance this year to do just that through a program offering a year-round, camp-like experience at the Toronto hospital.

And a fundraising event based in York Region is helping drum up cash for the program.

"It's a new approach we're trying and so far it's going really well," said Kirk Tobias, co-founder of the annual Ride For Karen cancer fundraiser.

When Kris and Kirk Tobias's mother, Karen, died of breast cancer in July 2002 at 53, the brothers decided to take a bike ride to clear their heads.

That ride sparked an idea between the pair: hold an annual bike ride as a cancer fundraiser.

The event, called Ride For Karen, has since raised enough money to send hundreds of children with cancer to summer camp, said Mr. Tobias, 35, who lives in Markham.

Children attend the Trillium, Quality and Oochigeas camps, geared specifically to children with cancer.

The ride starts in Maple and snakes north through Vaughan and participants have the choice of a 160-kilometre ride and a shorter, 25-km version. This year marked the 6th-annual Ride For Karen. About 350 people participated in the event, raising \$260,000.

Camp Oochigeas in Muskoka has organized a camp experience for children on Sick Kids' eighth floor available year-round, said Mr. Tobias.

Even children who are in isolation can participate by playing board games with each other at the camp, Mr. Tobias said.

"It might sound kind of silly, but it can really brighten someone's day," he said. "We're looking to

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create as much of a camp feel as possible in the middle of the city. It's a way to improve their lives every day of the year."

For next year's Ride For Karen, Mr. Tobias said he hopes to include a ride for children up to age 12. That event will likely involve an enclosed course so children can participate in raising cash for children to attend camp.

"It really gets young people involved in helping other young people who are battling cancer," Mr. Tobias said.

Mr. Tobias hopes to raise \$300,000 when Ride For Karen takes place in 2008. For more information on the event, to register or donate to the ride, visit www.rideforkaren.com

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