

Mulliganeers help children, families in need

Giving children in need a second chance is the goal of Pete Brown of Riverside and his Mulliganeers.

"A mulligan is a golfing term where the golfer is given a second chance when the first shot goes wrong," explained Brown. "A Mulliganeer is someone who is dedicated to giving children a second chance at life."

Brown and a dedicated group of volunteers organized The Mulliganeers 10 years ago. The group of lifelong friends would hear tragic stories involving very sick children and their families.

Although they could individually offer financial assistance to a family in need, the friends knew that collectively they could accomplish so much more. Thus, the Mulliganeers group was formed, giving kids and their families a "mulligan," or a second chance at life.

On March 5, the Mulliganeers hosted the 10th annual St. Patrick's fund-raiser to raise money for needy children and their families. The event, held at the International Brotherhood of Operating Engineers Hall in Countryside, attracted 1,100 supporters.

According to the group's mission statement, the nonprofit organization raises money for needy children and their families through golf outings and associated fund-raising dinners. Recipients of charitable donations generated by this group are determined annually by the board of directors and may vary from year to year. The recipients, however, are always children.

Kathleen Brown of Riverside was the beneficiary of the very first Mulliganeers St. Pat's party in March 1996. She was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma in 1995, when she was about to enter eighth grade. Her fight involved not only her family, but her guardian angel, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital in Memphis.

"We would have struggled tremendously without the generosity of this wonderful organization," said her father, Pete Brown. "Pat Byrne, Randy Ramsey, Bob Sheehy and Mike Zindrick, today's directors, had a vision 10 years ago."

Kathleen has graduated from the University of Illinois, and she and her family keep the dream of "giving kids a second chance" alive.

In 2004-05, the Mulliganeers were able to assist nine families. The tragic afflictions to hit children tear at the hearts of the families involved.

In 1997, Caroline Griffin benefited from the fund-raiser. At 3 months old, she received a heart transplant, her only hope of surviving severe congenital heart failure.

In 1992 her sister, Maura, died from the same disease at 3 months old. In 1996, the children's father, Michael, died from the same heart disease, at age 42. Caroline is now 11 years old and doing well.

Kieran Conway, Irish balladeer, has entertained at the St. Patrick's fund-raisers. His nephew, Ciaran Conway, was the recipient of the 1996 fund-raiser. Injured in an automobile accident overseas, he is now 9 years old.

Recipient of the golf outing in 2003 was Russell Engel, 3, who was injured when a drunken driver crashed a vehicle into the tent he and his family were sleeping in while vacationing in Wisconsin. A helicopter took Russell to a hospital in Madison, and emergency surgery was followed by much medical treatment. Today, doctors are hopeful that all brain transmissions will reroute themselves.

The next chance the public will have to support this good work will be Wednesday, June 15, at Mulliganeer Night with the Chicago White Sox when they play the Arizona Diamondbacks. The cost is \$25 per ticket for lower box reserved seats with the proceeds going to the Mulliganeers. For tickets, call Pete Brown at (708) 442-0236.

Since the Mulliganeers inception 10 years ago, they have distributed more than \$1.5 million to about 95 families. To submit a family for recommendation, e-mail Mary Ann Knepper at MAKnepper@comcast.net.

You may also contact any of the board or committee members to submit an application for financial support. Board members include Pat Byrne of Willowbrook, Randy Ramsey of Riverside, Bob Sheehy of Orland Park and Mike Zindrick of Hinsdale. Board of directors members include John Azzarello, Amy Benson, Matt Benson, Pete Brown, Paddy Conway, Cathy Degitis, Sam Fiorella, Becky Flanigan, Greg Griffin, Mark Karrasch, Beth Leuck, Dean Mackowiak, Mike Malone, Dan Murphy, Jim Murphy, John Passananti and Rich Tobin.