

WEEKLY WANDERINGS

Group helping families keep heads above water

Sometimes people facing tragedy fall apart under the pressure; other times they rise to the challenge. Pat Byrne of Willowbrook has not only risen to the challenge, but he's spent countless hours helping others do the same.

Ten years ago, Byrne's wife died during labor with their fifth child. He was left with five children under the age of 11, as well as considerable financial and personal hardships.

"It was a pretty traumatic experience, but the outpouring of support from family and friends was overwhelming," Byrne said.

Longtime friends and family members pitched in to help him with raising so many small children while he also was dealing with medical bills.

"I know the position I was in, and to be able to get up every day and function is a challenge, but when you have medical bills, it's overwhelming," Byrne said.

That's why a year later, when Byrne was talking with his friends about all he'd been through, they decided there had to be a way to help others in the same situation. Thus was born the Mulliganeers, an organization devoted solely to helping children in need.

Byrne, along with friends Randy Ramsey of Riverside, Bob Sheehy of Orland Park and Mike Zindrick of Hinsdale, planned a golf outing, with the proceeds going to help families with ill children or those dealing with the illness or death of a parent.

At the first golf tournament, 140 golfers showed up. That was eight years ago. More than 500 golfers teed off for charity at this year's outing.

The organization's fund-raising efforts grew to include a St. Patrick's Day party, with this year's attendance at more than 1,000 people. Many of the recipients of past years' fund-raising efforts attend the party, so volunteers and attendees can visit firsthand with those whose lives they have enriched.

Byrne is quick to note that the success of the Mulliganeers is not due to the four men who started the group,

but to the many volunteers who have stepped up to help.

"The idea came from four of us working together, but a lot of this is done by the volunteers. They've been an enormous support group for us," Byrne said.

Byrne said that people are interested in helping out with the nonprofit organization because it is entirely volunteer-driven, with minimal over-

head. The only paid staff member is a secretary who assists with mailings and other administrative tasks. The rest of the money goes to the families in need.

At first, the families were found through word-of-mouth. As the need for assistance has increased, families now submit information to the group's board of

directors. Families are chosen for a specific event, and the money earned is split between these families after the event is held.

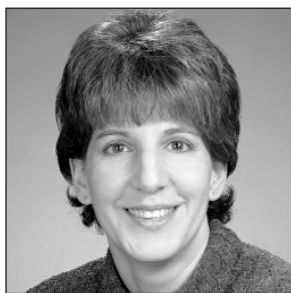
The Mulliganeers has helped the children of a single mother who died on Christmas Eve, leaving the children orphans. It also helped with the medical bills of a child with a brain tumor, a family in Naperville whose son was paralyzed after being beaten by another teen-ager, and children with autism whose treatment bills are not covered by insurance. The group has purchased gravestones for families who had no money left to bury their child.

For Byrne, the Mulliganeers has provided a way for him to give back to all those who helped him. He has since remarried, and his oldest child is chairman of his fraternity's philanthropy board, giving back to the community like his father.

"For the most part, people really want to help," Byrne said. "If you present them with the opportunity, this touches a lot of people."

For more information about the Mulliganeers, visit its Web site at www.mulliganeers.org or call Mary Brown at (708) 442-0236.

— Readers can contact Liz DeCarlo by leaving a message at (630) 887-0600, Ext. 3210, or by sending an e-mail to lizdecarlo@yahoo.com.



Liz DeCarlo

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— Pat Byrne

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INSIDE

NEWS

Series continues with story of Underground Railroad 7

OPINION

Restrictions about more than just water 20

BUSINESS PROFILE

Company brings color into customers' lives 49

VITAL SIGNS

Doctor still awed by magic of human life 69

DIVERSIONS

'Sound of Music' is alive with local talent 81

INDEX

Business 47	Education 36	Obituaries 16
Classified 117	Getting There 19	Opinion 20
Closeup 9	Homes 92	Police 14
Crossword 91	Images 55	Political 45
Diversions 81	Kids Club 90	Sports 150

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Published by
The Doings
Founded Oct. 5, 1895

440 E. Ogden Ave.
Hinsdale, IL 60521
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COVER



Caitlyn Ostrander, 2 1/2, waits patiently in front of the Tri-State Fire Protection District station for the next opportunity to add more candy to her bag during the Darien Lions Club's Fourth of July parade Friday. For more parade photos, see Page 3. (Doings cover photo by Mike Johnson)

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