

Fundraiser honors Jenna | Middle school students 'Kick it for cancer'

By Jason Chisari - jec2001@live.com , published Wednesday, May 25, 2011

FORT MILL --

When Fort Mill Middle School student Jenna Witherspoon lost her battle with cancer in 2006, she left behind a legacy of love for teachers, fellow students and younger sister Morgan (currently an eighth grader at FMMS). With the blessing of the Witherspoon family, teacher Laura Mathers made Jenna the face of the first annual "Kick it for Cancer" kickball tournament scheduled for Thursday, May 26.

"I know how difficult it is to lose a loved one to cancer, and I couldn't imagine losing a child to the disease," said Mathers, whose lost her mother to cancer six years ago. "Jenna was adored by many, and her name hangs over the event and makes it all the more important to the student body who might put themselves in her shoes."

From 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. Thursday, all 275 FMMS eighth graders will participate in several kickball games to promote physical activity and honor Jenna's memory. Friendly competition has been promoted between the classrooms regarding charity donations, with all the money collected going directly to CureSearch, an organization that funds pediatric and young adult cancer research. The top earning classroom will receive a pizza party, while the top individual student earner will have access to a bevy of prizes, including a Charlotte Bobcats jersey signed by shooting guard Gerald Henderson.



Jenna Witherspoon

For more information on the Kick-It for Cancer Program (which runs nationwide) and how to donate to the FMMS fund raiser, visit <http://www.kick-it.org/events/kickin-it-with-8th-grade>.

Prior to the event itself, Mathers will encourage her classroom to film "Get Well" video cards that will be delivered to cancer patients at the Charlotte-based Levine's Children Hospital. Mathers discussed the importance of charitable events as it pertains to the social media addicted youth generation.

"I wanted to show students that there are things they can do in the real world which impacts those around them," Mathers said. "The feeling of satisfaction that can come from doing something proactive just may peel them away from video games and Facebook."

Though the kickball festivities are relegated to the eighth grade only, it hasn't stopped sixth and seventh graders from dedicating themselves to the cause. Sixth-grade student Ryan Bunge raised \$50 dollars by traveling door-to-door playing his saxophone, while fellow sixth grader Anna Handyman donated \$30 dollars of her allowance.

Setting a goal to raise \$2,000 for children's cancer research, FMMS currently sits at \$965 with donations continuing to pour in every day. Mathers has hopes that she can parlay the success of the event into a district-wide initiative, with all local schools participating in the near future.

For Mathers, the outpouring of support shown by the student body speaks volumes about the potential for compassion in all people.

"It seems like we live in a world where everyone is out for themselves," Mathers said. "But seeing the students' enthusiasm to help gives me hope that the local community and kids can make a difference."