

'Mommy's Light Lives On' through golf tournament

The son of the founder of the charity organization writes on this year's inaugural tournament, which raised \$150,000

By Bryan Toporek

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Baking cookies. Going to a performance of "The Nutcracker Suite." Planting flowers in a garden.

These activities sound like such simple things, but to some children in the region, these are the traditions that mean worlds to them. Traditions started by their mothers, perhaps in early childhood, and performed on a routine basis, like clockwork. But for children whose mothers are terminally ill, these traditions threaten to disappear, creating more chaos in an already strenuous period of life for the youngsters. Mommy's Light Lives On recognizes this reality and strives to continue these traditions for children affected by maternal bereavement.

On Monday, June 19, the Gulph Mills Golf Club hosted the first annual "Mommy's Light Lives On" golf tournament, aimed at benefiting children who have lost their mothers. Ninety-two golfers flew in from all around the East Coast, with sponsors such as Disney/ESPN, HBO, Comcast and MTV. Overall, the organization raised \$150,000 in the outing, bolstering the plans to eventually to expand nationwide.

Mommy's Light Lives On, which has its business address in Lionville, is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1997 by Mary Murphy, a mother who was diagnosed with cancer when her only child was nine years old. After Mary battled through chemotherapy and radiation treatments and enjoyed a period of remission, the cancer returned stronger than ever in late 1997, and she realized that the disease had become terminal. Before her death in January 1998, Murphy and a few close friends established Mommy's Light Lives On, an organization aimed at maintaining family traditions with the surviving members of each family. Doing this story had special significance to this writer in particular, considering he was the first beneficiary from the organization—Murphy was his mother.

I had fallen out of contact with the people running Mommy's Light right after my mother's death, but picked up an edition of The Trend Leader two weeks ago and saw this event advertised in our Community Calendar. I knew I had to be there.

Laura Munts, a good friend of Murphy's, is the executive director of Mommy's Light, and the organization could not be in more capable hands. Describing the organization as "a child we had to breast feed at first," Munts has watched the organization grow into a non-profit dynamo in the past few years.

Bill Widing, a member of the Board of Directors, joked at the dinner that "Mommy's Light is a women's charity... and thus has a lot of female imagery, to say the least."

Most of the recent expansion has occurred because of Mike Doyle, president of the Eastern Division of Comcast, and another member of the Board of Directors of Mommy's Light. A long time friend and "running buddy" of Munts, Doyle became involved with the organization when Laura brought her daughter Maggie, now 12, in as "the closer," as Doyle laughingly remembers.

"Anytime Laura wants something, she just brings in Maggie... how can I say no to that?," he said.

Doyle quickly found himself chairman of the golf tournament, responsible for "making sure we had golfers to play today and money raised for the foundation."

Because of his connections with Comcast, Doyle began recruiting friends and business associates from all over the country, and through his efforts, \$150,000 was donated to the foundation.

Doyle made his reason for involvement very clear during our interview and in his speech given at the dinner banquet:

"I don't get involved with charities because a lot of them are just resume-builders. I wanted something genuine. Something where the money went straight to the people in need. I found that in Mommy's Light, and haven't looked back ever since," he said.

Thus far, Mommy's Light has helped 101 children in the Delaware Valley continue a family tradition after the passing of their mothers, but the directors realize there is still an abundance of work to do. In the area alone, 20,000 children are eligible for these services and nationwide, 626,000 children under the age of 18 are dealing with the loss of a mother.

During the day of the tournament, four-somes from the different sponsors enjoyed a round of 18 holes on the prestigious Gulph Mills Golf Course. Some golfers, such as Mike Tallent, displayed skill worthy of the USGA, especially the day after the now-infamous Mickelson meltdown on the last hole of the U.S. Open.

Meanwhile, other corporate golfers lamented their lack of skills and played just for the fun of getting out of the office for the day and networking with other executives from different corporations. In the middle of play, Doyle, Munts, and yours truly went out on a "heckling" session for many of the golfers, and everyone was living it up on Monday.

No story about Mommy's Light could be



Photo by Bryan Toporek/Trend Leader

Mike Doyle, president of the Eastern Division of Comcast, takes a swing during Monday's "Mommy's Light Lives On" golf tournament at Gulph Mills Golf Club. The tournament raised \$150,000 for children dealing with maternal bereavement.

complete without mentioning the help of the volunteers. Doyle and Munts both emphasized just how important these volunteers were, and I had the pleasure of sitting down and talking with Jane Evans, the volunteer event coordinator. Evans was responsible for the logistics of the event, from lining up which course the golfers would play on, to designing the golf-themed centerpieces for the dinner/banquet.

When asked why she became involved, Evans replied that "everyone who comes in contact with the group seems moved by the purpose, and I was no different."

She personally thanked many of the volunteers that day, explaining that without their charity, the organization would have collapsed years ago, and they still fuel the fire of the organization today.

At dinner, Munts spoke of the plans for the future for Mommy's Light before revealing the group's new promotional DVD, which evoked tears from many of the participants. Munts dreams of expanding nationally with the group, a scenario

becoming increasingly likely based on their incredible fundraising of late.

Personally understanding the importance of the resurrection of family traditions, I honestly hope that this organization expands nationwide as soon as possible. Doing this story has brought me full circle—from a child in fifth grade wanting nothing more than to keep making his mom's famous butter cookies, to a college intern reconnecting with everything his mother embodied in a charity golf tournament. Monday was an incredible experience for me on many levels, and I would challenge anyone to learn about this organization and not be moved. Now, the responsibility is on everyone who reads this to get involved.

As Doyle told me, "The least someone can do is nothing. If you do anything, even the smallest thing, it means a lot more than you think."

For more information on Mommy's Light Lives On, visit www.mommyslight.org, or contact Laura Munts at 610-725-9790.