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Thursday, May 12, 2011

OLD BRIDGE COMMUNITY RALLIES AROUND STUDENT

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Dylan Mateyka loves to play baseball for the Old Bridge Little League. In fact, during a game on April 30, he pitched for one inning and then played first base. Nothing too unusual about that, except that Dylan, a 14-year-old freshman at Old Bridge High School, had to have a doctor's permission to play in the baseball game. According to his mother, Diana Mateyka, Dylan was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia (AML) on New Year's Eve 2010 and is currently undergoing treatment at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick.

"Dylan couldn't do any sliding during the game, so he wasn't able to play his shortstop position," said his mother, who is a teacher's aide at the M. Scott Carpenter Elementary School in Old Bridge. "He even went bowling that weekend, too." Diana Mateyka said Dylan came home for the period from Easter Sunday to May 4, when he returned to the hospital for continued treatment for the next four to six weeks. He is doing well on the treatments, and the hospital staff has been wonderful, she said.

She said the family is remaining positive and taking it one day at a time, with an added bonus that Dylan is no longer so

tired, pale or sleepy. "We're glad to have our son back that we had last year," said Diana, who resides in Old Bridge with her husband, John, who works for the New Jersey Department of Transportation, and their older children — Nicole, 22, and John, 16.

"He does have a bald head, but it's a cute bald head," Diana said of Dylan.

The Mateyka family has been overwhelmed and touched by the support that Dylan has received from the community, including friends, relatives, school staff and students, and complete strangers.

"There is so much love coming from all directions," Diana said. "Complete strangers have made donations and provided food for us. Friends have held fundraisers, and the staff and students at Old Bridge High School have been just wonderful. I and my family are in awe of all the support."

A special gift to Dylan was a hospital visit from New York Yankees pitcher Mariano Rivera. That was arranged by Old Bridge resident Scott Mechkowski, a former baseball coach of Dylan's.



Above: Yankees pitcher Mariano Rivera pays a visit to Old Bridge's Dylan Mateyka.



Peer leaders Jackie Corbett (l) and Klaudia Korley serve up pasta at a fundraiser to benefit Dylan Mateyka, an Old Bridge freshman diagnosed with leukemia.

The youngster also received phone calls from Yankees players Mark Teixeira, Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez. The family's friend, Lon Trost, who is the Yankees' chief operating officer, made those possible.

"Mariano Rivera gave me a signed baseball, a poster and other Yankees memorabilia," said Dylan, speaking during his recent visit home. "I was invited to the season's opening game, but couldn't attend because I was still in the hospital. It was really nice."

Dylan might be seeing these Yankees in person later this year, compliments of the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

"My wish is to be a Yankee for the day," he said. "I'm looking forward to this, and perhaps in September this will happen."

In the hospital, Dylan is keeping up with his studies through the Embrace Kids Foundation, which is located in New Brunswick and aids children with cancer and blood disorders and their families. He said he misses his classmates and wanted to convey his gratitude to them and to all those who have helped and lent support.

Tracy Romeo, Dylan's aunt, is an OBHS physical education and health teacher. She described a few of the numerous fundraising events for Dylan.

The high school's peer leadership classes, under the direction of Rose Meade, the school's activities coordinator, and physical education/peer leadership teacher Cheryl Mackey, held a pasta fundraiser in April. This event, "Battle for the Beast," raised over \$5,000 and was attended by 450 people from the school and the community at large.

"It was called 'Battle for the Beast' because the 'Beast' is Dylan's nickname," said Romeo. "Dylan is a tough kid who is always battling and fighting. He never shows his pain or gives up."

Other fundraiser are also planned:

On May 20, the 20th annual William D'Ambola Memorial Golf Outing will be held at Pebble Creek Golf Club, Colts Neck, with all proceeds benefiting Dylan. To register, contact Bill D'Ambola at 732-266-5302 or email wdambola@simpsonandbrown.com.