

Every swing helps a child



Brian and Terri Vandendool and their son, Brandon, with a few of the Tiger dolls the foundation Mike's miracles gives away to children at McMaster Children's Hospital.

BY MIKE ZETTEL
STAFF

Those who live and breath golf, along with those who only play on occasion, again have the chance to test their skills and perhaps be lucky enough to walk home with a million dollars.

The St. Catharines Kiwanis Club's \$1-million hole-in-one challenge takes place next week, starting Tuesday, Aug. 11, wrapping up on Sunday, Aug. 16.

On each day of the competition,

participants aim to sink their ball in the hole 100 yards away, with the 10 whose ball landing closest to the target qualifying for the semi-final round Sunday afternoon.

For the semi-finals, the target is moved out a bit, to 150 yards away. Each of the 60 semi-finalists receives three balls, with the 10 closest going to the final round later in the afternoon. A hole-in-one on the first swing in this round earns golfers a \$25,000 prize, while the second and third swing prizes are \$10,000 and \$5,000 respectively.

For the final round, the 10 golfers get just one ball, and a hole-in-one earns them \$1 million. Otherwise, the top prize for closest to the hole is a trip to Whistler, B.C. for a hole-in-one challenge in September.

As before, there is a special ladies round on the Thursday of the competition, during which the top 10 competitors earn prizes.

Kiwanis event chair Michelle Basciano said in a certain sense, the million-dollar competition title is something of a misnomer as it fails take into account the plethora of

prizes being awarded, courtesy of Home Hardware.

Besides the top prize for a hole in one, the top 10 competitors on each day of the contest will receive prizes ranging in value from \$500 to \$100. As well, Kiwanis volunteers will be handing out instant prizes for mini contests at various points during the day.

There's all kinds of prizes we're giving out all the time throughout the week, Basciano said. That's why it's really an event for everybody. With the help of event sponsors, the Kiwanis raised about \$19,000 during last year's challenge. This year, the goal is \$20,000.

As they did last year, the Kiwanis are again teaming up with the charity Mike's Miracles, which shares their mandate of helping children. A portion of the proceeds will be directed towards Mike's Miracles, which is named after 12-year-old Mike Vandendool, who died of cancer in April 2008 after a 17-month battle. Mike grew up quickly in his last 17 months, most of which was spent at McMaster Children's Hospital in Hamilton. While there, he was appreciative of all the support he received from organizations dedicated to helping children. However, he saw that not all children had the same opportunities he was blessed with, and the foundation he started, Mike's Miracles, represented his determination to correct that.

With more than a year under its belt, Mike's Miracles has a long list of accomplishments, most recently delivering its third sailboat to Camp Trillium, which is located south of Brantford and serves children who are battling cancer or have battled the disease. Mike attended the camp with his family the summer before he died.

The charity also worked with students at Beacon Christian Schools, where Mike attended, on a toy drive in December, delivering gift packages to children at the McMaster

pediatric cancer ward. And recently, it initiated the Tiggers for Kids drive, delivering stuffed versions of the Winnie the Pooh character from which Mike derived one of his nicknames.

Mike's father, Brian Vandendool, said the foundation is going strong and is keeping his son's dream alive.

It's amazing, actually, he said. It just keeps going. It also gives the family, who miss Mike everyday, something to hold on to, something to focus on other than his death, he said.

You don't want to dwell on that, he said. We want to dwell on how we can make this positive. He left us with a positive job, a positive mandate. The challenge runs 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. from Tuesday to Saturday and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sunday. Westport Practice and Training Facility is located on Third Street, just north of the QEW.



Golfers at Westport Practice and Training Facility will be swinging for prizes next week, including the top prize of \$1 Million for a hole in one.

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