



FocusFAA

FAAers Enlist in a Hair-Razing Experience

September 28, 2011 – Two FAA employees “let their hair down” recently to raise money for a poignant cause.

Last month, Rebecca Wolfe and Matt Sullivan from the Potomac TRACON had their hair shorn to raise money to develop non-toxic treatments — and to find a cure — for neuroblastoma, a malignant tumor that most frequently occurs in children under five years of age. It is the most common abdominal tumor seen in children and is the fourth most common childhood cancer.

“Most kids that are diagnosed are usually Stage III or IV by time of diagnosis,” said Wolfe. “Unfortunately, about 25 percent of all pediatric cancer-related deaths are due to neuroblastoma. It's truly a beast.”

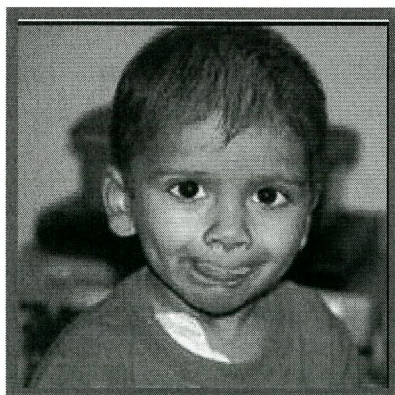
Wolfe and Sullivan participated in a yearly event called “Team Curing Hand Shave-a-Thon” in Manassas, Va. The goal was to raise \$25,000. Wolfe brought in \$4,000 just by herself.

Wolfe, a management/program assistant in the ATO, has found a niche in her private life coaching charities to raise money for worthy causes through endurance events like the Marine Corps Marathon.



Rebecca Wolfe in pre-shorn days.

The endurance team she helped establish and coaches, “Team Curing Hand,” is sponsored by the Ishan Gala Foundation. Ishan Gala was the 2-year-old son of Wolfe's friends, Mayank and Sejel Gala, who died of neuroblastoma in 2008. His parents formed the foundation to raise money and awareness of the tragic disease.



Ishan Gala

“Ishan loved to be involved in everything around him,” Wolfe recalled. “When they painted his room, he stuck his hand in the paint and left his little handprint on the wall in his room. When he passed away, they left it there in his memory.” Hence the name Team Curing Hand, when it came time to create an identity for the endurance team.

Sullivan, too, has a personal interest in the cause. His daughter, Mattie, is a neuroblastoma survivor. She was diagnosed with the disease as a newborn. “It was scary,” said Sullivan. “We just met her. She had a big place in our heart, both for her mother

and myself. It was pretty painful.”

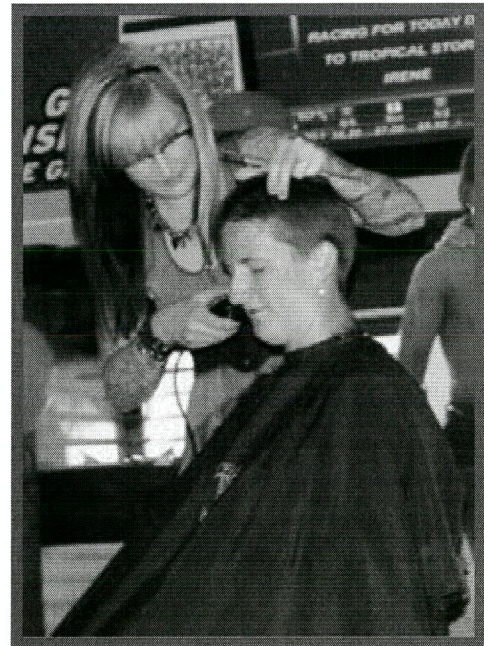
Mattie's young age might have been her biggest break. For children under the age of one, the survival rate is quite high. For children older than one year, the mortality rate skyrockets to 80 percent. Mattie is a healthy, "spirited" 11-year-old now.

Because he heard about the charity event late, Sullivan wasn't able to raise as much money as he would have liked. He did recruit six other FAAers to participate in this year's event. But next year, he plans to make a bigger splash in the Shave-a-Thon by raising awareness among his colleagues.

"This would be a good event for controllers," Sullivan remembers thinking. "We got a black eye a couple of months ago. We don't believe that's who we are," he added.

In addition to the money raised at the event, the shorn locks were contributed to the Pantene Beautiful Lengths program that gives free wigs to cancer patients.

"Because I have a lot of hair, I was able to donate seven viable ponytails," Wolfe said proudly.



Rebecca Wolfe gets her hair cut.

What was it like to see her long brown hair fall in strips around her shoulders? "It was a little surreal, especially because the stylist handed me the pony tails and I sat there with my hair in my hand," Wolfe said. "When I went to boot camp 20 years ago, I got my hair cut, but not like this. When I look in the mirror, it takes me a second to recognize myself," she added.



Matt Sullivan (left) and Rebecca Wolfe (center) join other participants in the Shave-a-Thon.

"I've done exactly what I've set out to do, which is to start up conversations," Wolfe said about Team Curing Hand. "Without this I would never have known about Matt and his daughter. That's the whole point and purpose of a brand new charity:

Getting the grass roots footing there and reaching out to people."

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