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Supporters help raise spirits of 9-year-old Pine-Richland boy recovering from brain surgery



TONY LARUSSA | Wednesday, February 3, 2021 10:26 p.m.



COURTESY PINE-RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT

Pine-Richland fourth grader Cooper Nindl gives the thumbs up while standing in front of a Northern Regional Police Department cruiser. The 9-year-old, who is recovering from surgery to remove a cancerous brain tumor, is the department's first honorary police officer.

Whether it's a pickup game of baseball, football or soccer or a game in an organized league, Pine-Richland fourth-grader Cooper Nindl loves all kinds of sports.

So when the active 9-year-old started to experience headaches in October, his parents thought he might be suffering from a concussion.

"He got a couple of bumps to the head in September, so when he began getting headaches we thought we should take him the emergency room to get checked out," said his mother, Jeanne Nindl.

But when treatments failed to relieve the pain, doctor's ordered an MRI to help them diagnose the cause, she said.

The test revealed that the source of Cooper's pain was a brain tumor that required immediate surgery.

"We never could have guessed that anything like this would happen to our family," Nindl said. "And it was so unfathomable that it would happen to our youngest."

Emergency surgery was performed at UPMC Children's Hospital to remove the cancerous Medulloblastoma that can affect muscle coordination, balance and movement. After the surgery, the family traveled to St. Jude's Hospital in Memphis, Tenn., for radiation treatment and additional care.

"Cooper made a huge improvement from the radiation and he's now back home resting," Nindl said. "We're getting ready to head back to Tennessee later this month so he can begin chemotherapy treatments, which will last about seven months."

Nindl said friends, family and members of the Pine-Richland community have helped ease the difficulties Cooper and his family have been facing.

"The support from our community has been awesome," she said. "We are so grateful. We try to remain upbeat and to take things day-by-day."

She said the personal messages, prayers and positive thoughts Cooper and the family have been receiving have also helped them deal with the challenges.

Friends of the family set up a gofundme page to help with the family's expenses.

John Sicilia, chief of the Northern Regional Police Department, said his staff wanted to do something to raise Cooper's spirits after officer Roy Chiaramonte learned about the boy's illness.

"We wanted to do something special for him, so we made Cooper the department's first honorary police officer," Sicilia said. "The majority of our officers are dads and big brothers so they really felt a connection with the boy and wanted to honor him for the bravery he's shown during this difficult time."

Cooper was sworn in at a ceremony last month that was attended by police officers, school officials and family and friends.

Cooper said he really enjoyed meeting the police officers and receiving the gifts.

But when asked if that might be something he would enjoy doing when he grows up, he paused.

“It sounds really interesting,” he said. “But I really want to play baseball.”

And while Cooper isn’t cleared yet to participate in sports, his heart’s still in the game.

“I’m going to baseball practice tonight,” he said. “I haven’t been able to see the kids on my team since the summer.”

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