

Blakefield bone marrow drive draws more than 750

When Loyola Blakefield mothers and supporters organized a bone marrow drive at the school Aug. 17, they hoped 500 people would come for cheek-swab testing.

Their hopes were exceeded, as more than 750 people arrived during a six-hour time span.

Every last one of them did it for Joe Gorman, a rising ninth-grader at the Towson all-boys school.

Gorman, 14, had been in remission from Leukemia, but recently relapsed. Doctors believe a bone marrow transplant is crucial to his recovery and the search for a match is ongoing

“It was a really great turnout,” said his uncle, John Handscomb. “I was worried it was going to be an empty room with about three people sitting in it. It was pretty crowded.”

Handscomb is a 1986 graduate of Loyola Blakefield and said Gorman optimistically expects to begin the bone marrow process this fall and “the hope is, it takes.” Gorman has begun the match process, and researchers have found a few “a couple of good matches.”

The Blakefield event was encouraging on many fronts, Handscomb said.

“It was a really nice atmosphere,” “It wasn’t sad or depressing, but just a supportive environment.”

Those who took part in the drive, called “Join for Joe,” were entered into a National Bone Marrow Registry. Handscomb said others who could not make the drive have committed to doing swab kits through the mail.

“Hitting that 750-plus mark was really nice,” Handscomb said. “If it comes out to 800, that’s 800 people going in the national registry. Even if it doesn’t help Joe, it’ll be great if it helps somebody else.”

Handscomb called Loyola Blakefield’s community “tremendous” for its outreach and support.

Overall, the process of pre-and-post transplant will take six months, Handscomb said.

Handscomb described his nephew as “sort of serious on the surface, but he’s got a funny side underneath. He’s very smart and does great in school. He likes to fool around like any child.”

Handscomb said Gorman is at home, alternating between in-patient and out-patient chemotherapy treatments.

Gorman is providing inspiration to his friends, family and the community at-large.

‘He’s doing pretty well,” Handscomb said. “It’s tough for him, but he holds up pretty well. I think if you think back to what you were like in eighth grade, he’s doing a better job of it than I would have. It’s tough.”

HOW TO HELP

Visit joinforjoe.com. If you didn’t make testing, you can still donate until Sept. 1. Visit donors.marrow.org/login.aspx?promo_code=JFJ817, then enter passcode JFJ817.

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Tax deductible donations are being accepted as well to cover the costs of swabs.

Make checks payable to: "Be The Match," and send it to P.O. Box 731, Riderwood, MD 21139-0731.