

Immaculate Conception students give hair for cancer patients

Noses scrunched, eyes were closed and deep breaths were taken May 27 inside the gymnasium of Immaculate Conception School in Towson. Sitting in makeshift salon chairs, more than 50 students were about to have the most memorable haircut of their lives.

Fellow students could only watch as their peers reacted to the sight of their hair being chopped. When the sound of scissors cutting stopped, those with fresh haircuts reached behind their heads to find their long locks no longer there. Many mouthed the words, "Oh my gosh!"

The students donated their hair to the Pink Heart Funds, which makes wigs for children and adults who have suffered cancer.

"I was nervous at first," said second-grader Nicki Swam. "It's so short. It feels really good because I know it's going to help a lot of people."

Organized as a service project by the school's fourth-grade Girl Scout troop for the second straight year, the afternoon event had a rock concert quality to it as much of the student body stomped their feet and sang songs.

At the same time, there was a strong current of humanity as well.

First-grade student Riley Fick underwent the ceremonial first cut from her mother, Bridget. Riley's younger brother has cancer.

The totality of the events moved some to tears, said one of the troop's adult leaders, Michele Beernink.

"It's unbelievable how emotional it is," Beernink said.

When the "hair assembly" began, the students getting their hair cut walked into the gymnasium as the song "Give A Little Bit" played on nearby speakers.

The number of participants grew during the last year, partly because the event was held later in this school year to allow second- and eighth-graders to participate in sacraments and graduation ceremonies first.

The Pink Heart Funds was chosen because the organization accepts as little as six inches of donated hair. Some other organizations require a little more.

"We wanted something that could be accessible for all our girls," Beernink said. "They could grow six inches."

After the cut, the students with new cuts had their hair professionally styled by local salons that donated services.

Before the event, the scouts were asked how many of them knew someone who had been through a cancer battle. Nearly every one raised a hand.

"It's unfortunate they're so young and have to deal with something like that," Beernink said.

Grace Oakey, one of the fourth-grade Girl Scouts, said the cause was a great one.

"We get to help kids who have cancer and hopefully make them feel better about it,"

After the hair was cut, Oakey and fellow scout Sara Walsh took bags of newly cut hair and placed them in a larger bag to be sent to Pink Heart Funds.

Walsh said the troop was proud of Immaculate Conception students for giving unselfishly.

"It's really sweet knowing all these girls are doing this, sacrificing their beautiful hair, just to help someone in need," Walsh said. "It's really exciting because we organized it all."