

Leos club straps on skates for cystic fibrosis research

By CATHERINE BAUM Staff Writer



KEN BLAIR

Eighth-graders Faith Batnode, Jeff Van Oudenhove and Austin Mayo take a break to munch on nachos and sip drinks.

[Originally published on: Thursday, December 27, 2007]

EASTHAMPTON - Brett Pyser, 13, has a cousin who plays the guitar, saxophone and lots of video games. The two boys are the same age, and have a lot in common. Except one thing: cystic fibrosis.

"I feel really bad for him," Brett said of his cousin, Josh Pyser. "He has to take a lot of pills every time he eats something, and he has to do some vibrating vest medication every night."

The chronic disease affects a person's lungs and digestive system.

Brett told Larry West, the adviser of the Leos service club at White Brook Middle School, that the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation is trying to find a cure and that the Leos could help by organizing a fundraiser at Interskate 91. West liked the idea.

So a couple of weeks ago, 51 middle school students, mostly fifth- and sixth-graders, came out to roller skate. They played Lazer Storm tag, danced to the music and ate cheese dogs from the snack bar. The club raised \$175 for the foundation.

"It was a pleasant afternoon," West said. "The kids were very resilient. I can't tell you how many times they fell down and got right back up without any problems."

West noted that some skaters were rookies, while others were veterans.

Nate Clifford, 13, of Williamsburg, visits the skating rink every weekend. This trip, however, was different.

"Most of my friends were there and they don't really go," Clifford said.

Faith Batnode, 14, received a free soda after winning a race around the rink, and Hannah Ghaitis, 12, enjoyed free popcorn with her friend for winning the girls scooter race.

"They race not just to win free soda but because it's fun to get first place," Clifford said.

Four chaperones helped out.

Sandra Fasoli drove her daughter, Melanie, 13, and Melanie's friends to Interskate from the middle school. The bus was full, so some chaperones took the kids. Fasoli's 22-year-old nephew, a student at UMass, has the disease. Fasoli said the disease attacked her nephew's pancreas, and that he has been in and out of the hospital since he was young.

This was the first trip the club took, though they have also served meals for Easthampton community dinners and participated in a parade and the fall festival, West said. The group also sang carols last week at the Treehouse Community, an intergenerational housing community aimed at supporting adoptive families and elderly residents.

The students have requested another Interskate trip, so West is planning another one in January or February.

Catherine Baum can be reached at cbaum@gazettenet.com.