

Long Island Now

Penelope's Odyssey honors Sea Cliff child's cancer fight

Sunday July 22, 2012 10:55 AM By Brittany Wait



Last August, Penelope Ruderman donned her handmade green visor, put her mother's running medal around her neck and ran a pretend solo "marathon," circling the dining room table at the family's Brooklyn apartment.

"Penelope always saw herself as a runner," said her mother, Lori Schneider, who recently moved with her family to Sea Cliff. "We had a cheering station and water station."

Almost one year before, in September 2010, her daughter was diagnosed with leukemia at age 3. After she received a bone marrow transplant in January 2011, she was isolated at home for months and only able to leave the Brooklyn apartment wearing a mask over her mouth.

Penelope, now 5, has grown up watching her mother run marathons, so during the isolation period she chose to run laps in the apartment with her parents and brother Felix as spectators.

"Her biggest memory is watching me run while sitting on her grandpa's shoulders," Schneider said. "In a lot of the runs, I'll grab her when I approach the finish line and we'll run together."

In June of last year, the family formed a nonprofit called Penelope's Odyssey, named after their daughter's journey battling leukemia, and has partnered with DKMS Americas, the world's largest bone marrow donor center.

"I was brave in transplant when I got shots," said Penelope, lifting up her shirt to show the scars.

On July 13, the nonprofit held a bone marrow donor drive during Sea Cliff Beach's Friday night summer music series, where people could sign up to be on the donor registry. The nonprofit will make another appearance at the same event on Aug. 24 from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.

The family would like to eventually create a website to offer families a place to get information on mental health support and assistance with paperwork.