

Families with ill children find peaceful respite

MAKING LIVES BETTER

Believe in Tomorrow's House by the Sea offers relaxing retreat at beach

SUSAN CANFORA
News Editor

(Aug. 10, 2007) Keeghan Barry has always wanted to find a cure for cancer.

It was ironic, then, that in April of 2006, during an MRI to determine why the boy's broken nose wasn't healing correctly, a brain tumor was discovered.

"I panicked when Dad tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'Keeghan, they may have found something on the MRI,'" the well-spoken 11-year-old boy said.

"Then they said, 'It's rare.' I said, 'So, it's rare?' I didn't want to have this rare cancer," said the son of Major Michael and Shannon Barry, a military family stationed at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, D.C., so they can be close to Walter Reed General Hospital, one of a handful of military pediatric units in the country.

A native of California, Mrs. Barry and her husband, from Ontario, were transferred to Bolling Air Force Base from near Houston in July 2006, to be close to Walter Reed.

Keeghan has a sister, Mackenzie, 13. Last week, the Barrys were in Ocean City, staying at Believe In Tomorrow House By The Sea, as a respite from treatments and hospital visits. On the ocean side on 66th Street, the house is sponsored by Believe in Tomorrow, which, founder Brian Morrison said, "has made a major initiative to serve military pediatrics"

"We have been really increasing the number of military families we serve in



OCEAN CITY TODAY/SUSAN CANFORA

The Barry family, parents Michael and Shannon, 13-year-old Mackenzie and 11-year-old Keeghan enjoy a walk on the beach during their weeklong stay at Believe in Tomorrow's Children's House by the Sea on 66th Street in Ocean City. Spending time as a family and maintaining a sense of humor has helped the family endure Keeghan's battle with a brain tumor.

retreat and hospital housing programs. We want to create an environment for them to renew themselves as they go through this treatment journey," he said.

Started in Ocean City in 1986 in a condominium, the program grew to include town houses and, eventually, due to demand, the building on 66th Street was built. It has five two- and three-bedroom units.

There are also Believe in Tomorrow houses in nearby Fenwick Island and Bethany Beach, Del.

"Believe in Tomorrow House by the Sea in Ocean City is a beautiful building. It's a place families can go and sit on the deck and just relax and forget the stress of yesterday's treatment and what is going on in their lives," Morrison said. "At Believe in Tomorrow, what we really try to accomplish is for them to have hope and enjoyment in their lives.

"Military families have a particularly tough road to go down. Health care is adequate, sometimes good, for pediatrics, but the support systems are not quite so good. Families might be far from home," he said, adding often both parents can't accompany the child.

"It is a major hardship for many families deployed to war areas because while the child is being treated, it leaves one parent to deal with that," Morrison said.

Children served by Believe in Tomorrow range from infancy to age 18, and are being treated for critical illnesses including cancer and organ transplants.

"They are often young. The average age probably is 10," Morrison said.

While Keeghan fits into that age category, he is wise beyond his years.

"You can be scared, but really deep down. Sometimes on chemo days I would get scared," he said, adding he was prescribed a chemotherapy pill taken once every six weeks, at night on an empty stomach. "The next day, I felt like garbage."

"He would just feel so sick. He would be on the sofa all day," his mother said.

Keeghan had surgery twice to remove the tumor, 14 months of chemotherapy and six weeks of radiation and is doing well, although doctors don't use the term "remission."

He will see his doctor every month, go through monthly antibiotic treatments, have an MRI every three months for a while and annually the rest of his life.

"Every day is frightening, but you have to carry on in a normal way. You have to keep laughing. Just because you're scared you can't stop being a parent. Half of getting through it is family and half is positive attitude. You just cry a lot in the dark," Mrs. Barry said.

Life is returning to normal.

Her son is planning to go to a camp with other children who have cancer. Sister Mackenzie just returned from a camp for siblings of children who have cancer.

"At first, nobody was asking how I was because they were worried about Keeghan, but I understand. I'm doing fine. My brother is my best friend," Mackenzie said.

Their father said he was strengthened from a strong support group that includes co-workers who asked about his son every day.

"This is the first time since before See WEEK on Page 38D



Brian Morrison



OCEAN CITY TODAY/SUSAN CANFORA

Keeghan Barry was often frightened during treatment for a brain tumor, but was able to relax at the beach.

Week at beach called 'wonderful'

MAKING LIVES BETTER

Continued from Page 33D

Keeghan got diagnosed that we've been away from home that didn't involve a hospital stay," Mrs. Barry said.

"Believe in Tomorrow House by the Sea is amazing. We feel like we're mooching off somebody because all these people are providing all this stuff for us. We went to Hooper's for dinner with some of the other families that are here. It was wonderful. Believe in Tomorrow paid for it. It was just the most bizarre thing. We felt like we were running out on a meal," she said.

Other activities included a visit to Jolly Roger Amusement Park, boogie boarding, fishing and a beach party.

"I really needed to come to a beach. It helped me forget and just move on," Keeghan said. "I've gotten back to boogie boarding and finding sea shells. It's good to get a tan back. I've been in the hospital so much I turned pasty white."

Sometimes, his mother said, as she

walked with a visitor from the beach back to Believe in Tomorrow House last Tuesday evening, she wonders if it's her fault, if she did something during her pregnancy to cause Keeghan's cancer, maybe inhaled second-hand smoke, but doctors don't know the cause. There is no history of cancer in the family. Regardless, his type of brain tumor isn't considered hereditary.

"It's kind of a fluke," Mrs. Barry said. "One of my children having cancer was always my worst fear. Of the two of them, if anybody got it, I always knew it would be him. When they told me he was diagnosed with cancer I said, 'No. No, you don't understand. Keeghan is going to find a cure for cancer.'"

"I don't think I've ever been afraid as everybody else," Keeghan said.

His mother smiled at him.

"It's almost easier when you're in it, when you're fighting it than when you're worrying about it," she said. "I don't think from Mike's and my standpoint, we will ever stop being afraid."