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## Happy Feet to raise money for pediatric brain tumor research

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN • OBSERVER STAFF WRITER • MAY 18, 2008

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Karen Cioma-James still misses her daughter Leah every minute of every day but she's more determined than ever not to let her be forgotten. On May 31, the James family holds Happy Feet for Happy Hearts, a 5-k walk to raise money for pediatric brain tumor research at Maybury State Park in Northville.

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Leah died from a diffused pontine brain stem glioma Aug. 3, 2005, a little more than a year after being diagnosed then undergoing radiation treatments at C.S. Mott Children's Hospital at the University of Michigan. She was 5½ years old. One of her favorite sayings was 'my heart is happy'.

"I feel like I have to do something. I feel very helpless," said James. "The walk's like a tribute to her. We want to promote awareness. Along the trails there will be heart signs with photos of Leah and a poster board Wall of Courage of children who have died of brain tumors. I belong to several online support groups so from all over the U.S. parents have been sending me photos of children who have died of brain tumors. To me it's unacceptable. Something has to be done."

James headed up a dinner auction last May to raise money for children dying from brain tumors and their families. She recently gave Mott a \$10,000 check for pediatric palliative care from proceeds of the first event plus donations. Last Dec. 23, volunteers with Leah's Happy Hearts visited children on three floors of the hospital.

"The walk will help make our next Christmas event at Mott even more special," said James. "Last year was so fun. We purchased gifts and some gifts were donated by people in the area. With help of the Girls Scouts we made fleece blankets and brought all these gifts so the children could pick out gifts for their families. We took photos of the children and put them in a snow globe. We also gave the kids gifts. For me it keeps her memory alive by doing these types of things."

On May 31, James, her husband Phil and their 11-year-old daughter Kylie will be helping at the walk after which a light lunch will be provided. Sponsors include UAW Chrysler, Independent Bank in Livonia, and St. Mary Mercy Hospital where Leah went to pre-school. Elementary schools are becoming involved as well. Riley in Livonia is promoting the event as is Northville Christian School which Kylie attends.

"There will be a fire-truck, clowns with balloons and tattoos of Leah's (heart shaped) logo that Leah actually drew," said James. "We are encouraging everyone to get pledges of \$100 or more and they will be entered into a drawing for a Nintendo Wii or Tiger tickets. If you pre-register you're guaranteed a T-

### HAPPY FEET FOR HAPPY HEARTS

What: 5k walk in memory of Leah James to raise money for pediatric brain tumor research  
Where: Maybury State Park, Northville. \$6 park entrance fee required  
When: Saturday May 31, 8:30 a.m. registration, 10 a.m. walk  
Cost: \$20 adults, \$10 for children under age 18, 5 and under free.  
To register, visit [www.leahshappyhearts.org](http://www.leahshappyhearts.org)

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shirt. Rain or shine we will walk.

"It's a great way to raise money and bring the community together. We have friends, families and the community walking for a purpose. For me that's powerful and supportive. I think the walk promotes awareness, that there is no cure, that this can happen to anyone. Rarely do these children live past a year and it always results in death."

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