

Drag racers fire up their cars for 10-year-old cancer victim

By ALLEN MOODY
of the East Oregonian



There is no shortage of heroes in the world of athletics. But professional athletes, the same people admired by children and those young at heart, have heroes of their own. And if you were to ask the professional drag racers in the Northwest who they admire most, the answer wouldn't be another racer. It would be Codi Jean Frazier, a 10-year-old girl from Keizer.

"She came out to the race track and told me how honored she was to meet us," said Hermiston drag racer Mitch Myers. "I told her we're just a bunch of overgrown kids out here tearing up parts and having a good time. The honor was ours just to meet her."

Codi's list of accomplishments is impressive for any age: Grand marshal at Relay For Life in Marion County, honorary state senator, honorary Rotary member, birthday party at the governor's mansion, honorary crew pit member and honorary junior member of Kiwanis, just to mention a few.

But what really makes Codi stand out is how she's faced her battle with Osteosarcoma, the latest in a line of tragedies and the one doctors believe will soon take her life.

"Each one of the tragedies that she's faced, she has come through with her spirit intact," said Loni Barrett, her step-aunt and legal guardian. "I'm amazed at how she handles things. She was diagnosed with cancer and lost her leg, lost her mother, was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes and now has incurable cancer — and through it all she's held up pretty well."

Codi Frazier

Codi has shown the heart of a true champion during the past 3 1/2 years, refusing to yield to the killer disease that will eventually consume her tiny body. She is determined to take advantage of every moment, which includes the desire to help others facing similar challenges.

"We were at the hospital when she was told her cancer was incurable and that made her sad and she cried a little while, but she snapped out of it," Barrett said.

"She was released from the hospital and on the way out she saw a little girl had the same amputation as she had. She was eager to get out of there, but she went up and told the little girl that things were going to be OK."

She was diagnosed with Osteosarcoma in her left knee joint shortly before her seventh birthday, and doctors found the cancer had spread to her left lung. In February 2001, the tumor in the knee joint was removed by amputation.

In August of that year, she was sent home after completing chemotherapy and told the cancer

was gone. But her joy was short-lived; her mother died unexpectedly of septic shock in January 2002. That's when she moved in with her step-aunt.

In October 2002, Codi was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. Then last March she learned the cancer had returned, only this time it was inoperable and incurable. It had spread throughout her body.

Updates on Codi's condition and her journal can be found at www.codibug.com.



Mitch Myers

Codi has touched many lives, but perhaps none more than Myers. After a disappointing day at the races Sunday, he wasn't concerned about his bad luck on the track but the little girl who has captured his heart.

"If the worst thing that can happen to me in my life is to let it bother me that I red-lighted three weeks ago or that my car smoked the tires today, then I'd be a pretty self-centered, selfish individual when there's a little girl who's fighting for her life and she's asking about us and how we're doing," Myers said Sunday. "It's very humbling to me."

While Myers has a national victory under his belt, something some drivers spend their entire lives pursuing, perhaps his greatest accomplishment occurred in June when he told Codi he was going to go out and break the track record for her. He then did exactly that.

"That little girl has changed my life," Myers said. "If I could trade all of my racing stuff, my cars, everything, to make that little girl better I'd do so in an instant." But the admiration between Codi, her family and the racing fraternity is mutual. "The racers came to Codi and invited her out to the race track and I don't think any of us could have ever imagined how that influenced everyone," Barrett said. "They sent her gifts and cards. They're wonderful people and an important part of our support group."

A lasting legacy

As with any true champion, Codi's legacy will remain for quite some time. In her desire to try and make something good come from everything she has encountered, she has brought attention to the causes and organizations she believes in, and unknowingly brought the plight of children with cancer into the political arena.

"Through her networking she met the governor and they've become very friendly," Barrett said. "He's one of her biggest supporters and they have a real genuine mutual affection ... there's no political agenda at all between either one of them. But when she's around politicians it exposes them to a little girl with cancer."

Codi's involvement with charities and service organizations isn't something that occurred just recently.

"She was involved in the Salem Kiwanis before this latest cancer was diagnosed," Barrett said. "She thought she was in remission and wanted to give something back." Among her favorite charities are the American Cancer Society, Relay for Life, the Kiwanis and Rotary. "I think she would want to raise awareness of the plight of children with cancer and their families," Barrett said. "She's a very loving and caring person." Codi has also made a tremendous impact on Barrett's life and she is hopeful that Codi has reached others as well. "I think that there's a fight against cancer that can be won," Barrett said. "It requires people to do something, anything."

While the final round in Codi's battle with cancer will undoubtedly go to the disease, nothing can take away from everything the little girl has accomplished. She is a true champion in every sense of the word and deserves the title hero.