

Family seeks prayers for Maria, as child endures rare cancer

AVON LAKE

By Lori E. Switaj

For the McNamara family, a miracle may only be a prayer away.

On April 1 of this year, just 10 days after the birth of their fourth child, Ed and Megan McNamara received heart-breaking news. Their 6-year-old daughter, Maria, was diagnosed with Diffused Intrinsic Pontine Glioma by the Cleveland Clinic.

"It is an inoperable, incurable brain tumor," Ed said.

The tumor is so rare, Ed said almost every doctor they consulted about potentially treating their daughter expressed interest in the case.

The little girl, a student at St. Raphael's in Bay Village, had been experiencing double vision and loss of hearing, the result of the tumor. Eventually the McNamaras, of Avon Lake, settled on St. Jude Hospital in Memphis and soon began treatment, hoping for the best.

"Usually a diagnosis with this tumor means a life expectancy of 10-12 months," Ed said.

The McNamaras are hoping that with the proper treatment they may see better results.

They are also relying on the power of prayer.

Some of their prayers may have already been answered.

Within three weeks of her diagnosis, Maria began receiving radiation treatment at St. Jude. Due to the nature of radiation, patients can receive a series of radiation treatment only once. With her treatment complete, Maria is now able to see clearly and has recovered her hearing.

Posted on the family's Web site, www.prayersformaria.com, are two



Maria's family is counting on the power of prayer to help her overcome a rare tumor.

MRI images taken last week. The first shows the racquetball-sized tumor before treatment side-by-side with Maria's most recent scan, showing the tumor the size of a fingertip.

The family shared the news with a post.

"After viewing Maria's MRI scans yesterday, Dr. Gajjar, Maria's oncologist, came into the room to tell us that there has been some AMAZING progress," the post said. "The tumor...is almost gone!"

The family credits prayer with the tumor's shrinkage, which according to her family, and backed by Maria's oncologist as a virtual first.

"Prayer is the only thing I believe has caused this (tumor shrinkage)," Ed said.

The family has been asking

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~ Ed McNamara

supporters to pray for their daughter. Their Web site has been viewed by visitors from every continent, and well-wishers from around the world check in and post on a frequent basis.

On May 31, the community was invited to stop at St. Raphael's and recite a rosary for Maria.

"Over 600 people showed up," Ed said. "They came, said a rosary and left. There was no Mass, no service. Just a rosary. People who've never said the rosary came and prayed. It was unbelievable."

The family credited St. Raphael's Fr. Tim Gareau, who Ed called "an amazing man", as well as the support of friends in Avon Lake, Bay Village and the Northeast Ohio community with helping them through the ordeal.

"There are just so many people to thank," Ed said. "We're so very appreciative. We credit her progress with the power of community and the power of prayer."

Still, Ed admits they are not out of the woods yet.

On Sept. 7, Maria will return to see

if the tumor has remained shrunken. "Her situation is unique but the tumor is not gone," Ed said. "Tumors often shrink after radiation. They usually return in two to five months."

The family hopes that their situation is different, and believe that prayer is the answer.

"The shrinkage is pretty remarkable, but we don't know what it means yet until Sept. 7," Ed said. "We are asking for a lot of prayers on that day."

Friends and acquaintances have stepped up to do their part, hosting several fundraisers since Maria's diagnosis. Family friend Linda Sheehan is helping organize a 5K Fun Run and 1 mile walk July 29 at 8 a.m., starting at Bay Presbyterian Church in Bay Village. The event (\$20 for the run, \$15 for the walk) will help raise money for relapse treatment.

"It's very, very expensive," Ed said.

He also hopes to raise awareness of the rare tumor.

In the meanwhile, Maria, who graduated kindergarten in May, continues to "be a normal little girl," her father said, laughing and playing with friends and family.

Her parents hope, with the continued support of community and prayer, Maria will have many more days ahead of her.

"Just keep those prayers coming," Ed said.

For more information on Maria's journey or the Fun Run, log onto www.prayersformaria.com.

St. Raphael's Catholic Church