

Charity honors legacy of local hero

BY LARISSA DUDKIEWICZ

Don Spillane was riding through McConnells Mill State Park on his Harley when a girl came running out of the woods.

She flagged him down, screaming for him to help her friend who had fallen over a waterfall.

Spillane stopped his motorcycle and climbed down to help the panicked girl.

"He ended up falling because he didn't have the right shoes on, and it was slippery there," said his daughter, Dawn Hack of Cranberry Township.

Spillane, 47, died that day in May 2010 soon after paramedics arrived. The girl he attempted to help survived and was in a wheelchair for awhile, but is doing well now.

Hack founded the "Once Upon a Hero" charity to pay tribute to her father, who risked his own life to save someone he didn't know.

"We're just proud of his heroic efforts and wanted to start this charity in memory of him because he is our hero," said Hack, president of Once Upon a Hero.

Once Upon a Hero continues Spillane's legacy by helping those in need and is growing every year.

The organization became official in 2013 and recently established a board of directors, which includes Dawn's sister, Dana Bach, who is the vice president.

Their mother, Donna Spillane, is the Web developer, in charge of the website, graphic design and fliers. In addition to their annual fall party fund-



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Don Spillane, here holding his grandson, CJ, died while attempting to assist a girl who had fallen over a waterfall in McConnells Mill State Park.

raiser — a family-oriented event that includes food, dancing and prizes — they also are adding a second fundraiser this year.

The charity is hosting its inaugural golf outing on Aug. 22 at Stonecrest Golf Course in Wampum, with a shotgun start at 2 p.m.

"We've never done anything like this before," Hack said.

She credits Craig and Tina Pracht, who were friends of her parents. She said Craig is such a big golfer and has friends in the golf world. The couple came to one of the fall parties at the Mars Veterans of Foreign Wars and asked about doing a golf outing. Hack said they have been "a huge help" with organizing the event.

Craig Pracht, board member and golf chairman, said it's the least he can do to help Spillane's daughters keep alive the memory of their father, whom he called "a won-

derful man who lost his life trying to save that of another."

"It is a wonderful cause," he said.

So far, the charity has helped four local families in financial crisis. For each of the fall parties, Spillane said the charity picked families from Western Pennsylvania nominated by someone who contacted them and explained the situation. The family-oriented events include food, dancing and prizes.

"Usually the families are nominated to us. We get to know them and talk to them. It's nice that we are able to help someone who needs it," she said.

Three of the four helped were from the Cranberry area and one man was from Conway. The process of choosing who to help has been revamped so that those in need will now go through a screening process that includes filling out forms, undergoing background checks, providing financial proof such as income tax returns, and other information.

Hack said she wanted Once Upon a Hero to be a way to recognize her father and turn the grief and mourning into something positive.

"It was really sad because you wake up one morning and think it's just a regular day and before you know it, your whole

life is completely different."

The golf outing is fitting because Don Spillane enjoyed sports, particularly the Pittsburgh Penguins and the Steelers. He played baseball growing up, then softball. He also coached daughter Dana's softball team for many years. The charity hopes in the future to have a softball tournament on a summer weekend, though nothing that competes with the Cranberry Cup.

Hack said next year, the hope is their next outing will be a poker run because her dad loved riding his Harley.

Donna Spillane said her husband was also "an awesome grandpap," and only had one grandchild, C.J., at the time of his death.

"I am thankful he got to experience being a grandfather," she said.

Hack was married shortly after her dad died, and wishes her now 3-year-old daughter could have met him.

"My little girl has never met my dad. I'm upset about it, but I'm happy that I have this organization because my goal is that one day, as she gets older, she'll know and understand what he did and what we do now to carry on his memory."

Hack said she is excited about what's to come and thankful for the volunteers and support. She said it's great to know how many people loved her dad.

"I don't really know of a better feeling than helping someone," she said. "I'm completely overwhelmed with how many people continuously give up their time to help with this organization. I'm just so thankful for the friends and family that have made Once Upon a Hero so awesome."

Volunteers and sponsors are needed for the golf outing. More information is available at Onceuponahero.org

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