

# Mock's spirit carried on through 5K

## Young cancer victim's positive attitude honored by race

BY MARTIN FRANK • THE NEWS JOURNAL • MARCH 26, 2008 CHADDS FORD, Pa.

The logo on the T-shirt is a drawing of a sneaker with angels' wings on each side, with the saying "It's All Good" underneath.

For those who knew Billy Mock, it's the perfect way to honor a kid who always ran, who always smiled, and who was such a sports fanatic that he couldn't believe his parents had the nerve to take the family on a trip to Disney World during the NCAA Tournament a few years ago.

"He was probably the only kid who didn't want to be there," his dad, Bill, said with a laugh. Billy Mock was 13 when he died last June from a brain tumor. He battled it for 15 months after doctors told his parents that he probably wouldn't last more than three months.



But Billy Mock never lost faith or his positive attitude, constantly reassuring his family by saying, "It's all good." "No matter how sick he felt, he never changed his personality," said his mother, Gilda Mock. "That in itself was a miracle."

The second annual Billy Mock Foundation 5K Run/1 Mile Walk is a way for the Mocks to honor Billy's compassion for people and his passion for sports. The run will take place Sunday at Ridley Creek State Park.

The money raised will go to the Billy Mock Foundation, which will create a scholarship fund as well as support families in need. The foundation is affiliated with the Tug McGraw Foundation, which raises money and awareness for brain cancer research.

It's the Mocks' way of thanking so many people who supported them while Billy was battling his illness. It would have been a difficult enough ordeal for anyone.

Bill Mock, a Navy reservist and engineer, had just returned from Iraq six months before Billy started complaining of headaches. The elder Mock was in the Battle of Fallujah in the fall of 2004 and was decorated with several medals for his engineering work there.

Shortly after Billy was diagnosed, Bill was let go from his job during a restructuring. He wasn't at work much anyway because he was devoting all of his time to his family. Gilda was barely working at her job, either.

They both shuttled to and from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia while raising their other two daughters -- Maria, a 15-year-old sophomore at Ursuline Academy, and Tori, 8, a third-grader at St. Thomas the Apostle in Glen Mills, Pa.

"You can't imagine how paralyzing it could have been because Bill lost his job, and we could have lost our house," Gilda Mock said. "We might have had to pull our kids out of school. But so many people helped us. The foundation is our way of giving back to the community."

That community included their church, St. Thomas the Apostle. It was the church members who came up with the idea for a 5K last year.

Andrea Sheller, a family friend, got together in February 2007 with five other women at the church to brainstorm a fundraiser to help the Mocks with their expenses.

They decided on a 5K because they knew of Billy's love for running. He ran on the track and cross country teams at St. Thomas the Apostle. He also played basketball and soccer. But he loved running most of all.

"He would always tell me that he loved to run because it helped him clear his mind," Bill Mock said. "He ran everywhere."

The women solicited sponsors from the church bulletin. They went around to other businesses in the community. They told of Billy Mock's ordeal while passing out fliers, telling potential sponsors how he always kept that ebullient smile through everything.

Sheller said it resonated because they all saw a young boy and his family dealing so well with something so unfair.

"It was the easiest sell I ever made in my life," Sheller said. "People just wanted to give and be a part of it. They wanted to help the Mocks however they could. It was so heartwarming to see the community come together like that."

Still, Sheller said she was stunned when more than 1,100 people showed up for the run last March. They ran out of T-shirts and runners' bibs.

The Mocks couldn't attend because Billy's condition was grave. But Bill Mock's father went. He packed a cooler with water, thinking that a small amount of people would show up.

"We couldn't believe it," Gilda Mock said. "One woman called me in the hospital, and she was just crying the whole time. It was incredible."

The Mocks never wanted people to see Billy in the hospital. They wanted them to remember Billy the way he was -- the constant smile, the nonstop energy, the passion for life.

But Sheller said while she was at the Penn Relays in Philadelphia last April watching her son compete, she had an opportunity to visit the Mocks in the hospital. Children's Hospital is across the street from Franklin Field.

"That day I saw Billy changed my life forever," Sheller said. "I walked into the room, and there wasn't a single machine in there. All I saw was a mom and a dad so in love with their son that they would do anything in the world for him. I'll never forget that day as long as I live."

"Billy touched so many people, many he never even knew."

It was easy to see why.

When Billy was asked to plan a trip by the Make-A-Wish Foundation, he said he wanted a home theater instead so his entire family could have a place to enjoy movies.

When a friend of the family asked if Billy wanted tickets to see the Red Sox play in Fenway Park in the summer of 2006, Billy didn't hesitate, even though he was in a wheelchair and in constant pain. The friend, who got the tickets from Red Sox legend Carl Yastrzemski, also arranged for Billy to come onto the field and say, "Play Ball!"

So Billy, with the help of his family, slowly ambled out to behind home plate. He stood before the microphone with his sister Tori, proudly wearing his Red Sox cap and jersey. He yelled "Play Ball!" as loud as he could.

Billy received an ovation from the sold-out crowd.

It was all good.