

'Journey for Cure': Benefit raising funds to fight rare form of kids' cancer

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PORTSMOUTH, N.H. — A community of New England residents recently announced its commitment to sail from Portsmouth to Portugal to raise awareness and funds to fight a rare children's cancer called Pediatric Low Grade Astrocytomas, or PLGA.

Childhood brain tumors are the leading cause of cancer-related death in children. Pediatric Low Grade Astrocytomas are the most common childhood brain tumors. The Central Brain Tumor Registry of the United States estimates there are more than 20,000 children with PLGAs today and more than 1,000 new children get diagnosed with some type of PLGA each year.

A five-person crew will host a kick-off celebration, "PLGA Quest: Journey for a Cure," on Sunday, Sept. 28, at the Dockside Restaurant in York, Maine. All funds raised from this event will directly benefit brain tumor research at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. The sail itself is planned for June 2009, and the cost of the voyage is 100 percent funded by the crew. All individual donations and sponsorship funds raised will benefit the PLGA Research Program at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

"Brain tumors have surpassed leukemias as the leading cause of cancer-related death in children and PLGAs are the most common form of brain tumors, yet shockingly they are the least researched," said Dr. Charles Stiles, the chief PLGA researcher at Dana-Farber. "With so many families and children affected by this condition, it is tragic that the treatment options for PLGAs have remained virtually unchanged for nearly 25 years. We absolutely need to raise awareness and make it a priority to collect donations that will enable us to discover new and more effective treatment options for these incredibly brave kids."

Through the efforts of a handful of dedicated families and the PLGA Foundation, the Low-Grade Astrocytoma Program at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute was established in May 2007. The new concentration of research at Dana-Farber is believed to be the first coordinated research effort committed to this specific type of tumor. Scientists from a range of specialties focus on clinical and basic aspects of the problem, with a five-year goal of identifying a molecular target in the cancer that can be hit with a designer drug to treat it with substantially better outcomes and lower toxicity.

This flagship program, under the direction of Charles Stiles, PhD, and Mark Kieran, MD, PhD, draws resources from Dana-Farber's pediatric neuro-oncology program, the Department of Neurobiology at Harvard Medical School, Children's Hospital Boston, and the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard.

"When I first learned about the kids affected by this and heard their stories, I immediately wanted to do something to help," said Dana Anderson, captain and owner of Vision Quest, the 2003 Sabre 425 vessel being used for the sail. "I'm excited to set sail next summer, and we're hoping the community will come out and show their support at this very important kick-off event. There's a tremendous opportunity to make a difference, and it's so easy for anyone to take part."

Event details

What: PLGA Quest Journey for a Cure kick-off celebration for Trans-Atlantic voyage to benefit brain

tumor research at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

When: Sunday, Sept. 28, from noon to 3 p.m.

Where: Dockside Restaurant in York (www.docksidegq.com)

Donation: \$50 includes brunch, live music, cash bar and silent auction.

RSVP: PLGAQuest@gmail.com.