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Shriners give local family a reason to smile

By LISA TALLYN
Staff Writer

For many people, Shriners are the guys in the funny red hats who tool around in the mini-cars at parades, but the Prete family of Georgetown knows there is a lot more to them.

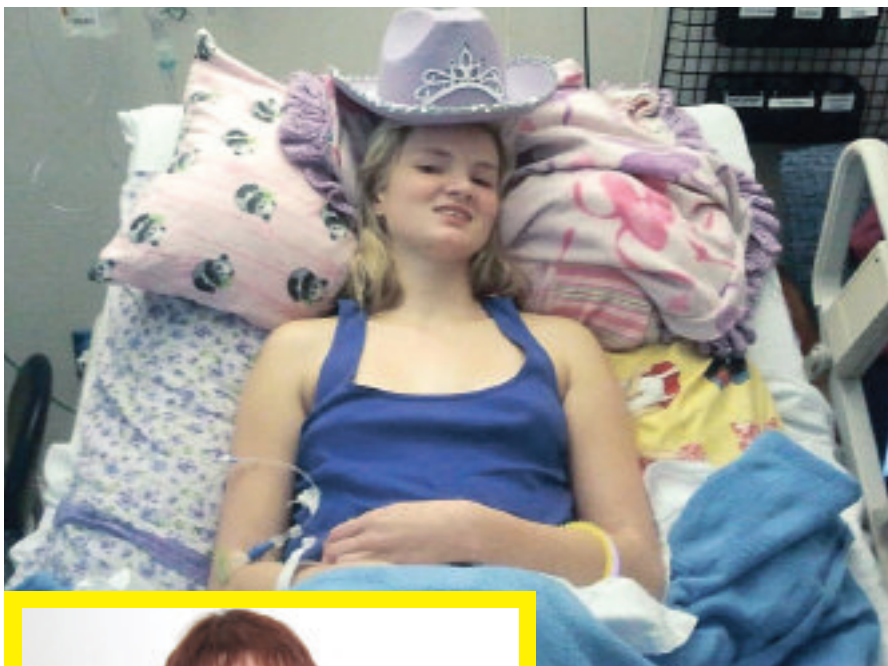
It was due to the Shriners that 15-year-old Michelle Prete was able to receive a new surgical procedure to help stop the progression of the curvature of her spine from scoliosis and eventually spinal fusion surgery at the Shriners Children Hospital in Philadelphia.

Michelle was diagnosed with scoliosis, an abnormal curvature of the spine, which is related to Ehler's Danlos Syndrome, a group of inherited connective tissue disorders, from which she also suffers.

Michelle's mother Merna Prete said she was seen by specialists at McMaster Hospital about the scoliosis and doctors offered her a brace to be worn 23 hours a day until she could have her spine fused. But Prete said her daughter also has Asperger Syndrome and has a lot of sensitivity issues so she knew that wearing a brace would be very difficult for her.

A member of her church congregation suggested the family apply to the Shriners. Fortunately they were accepted and were sent to see a specialist at the Shriners Hospital in Philadelphia, who suggested that Michelle would be a candidate for vertebral stapling surgery, an innovative technique of stapling vertebrae to correct scoliosis, which would mean she wouldn't need to wear the brace.

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Michelle Prete (above) of Georgetown recovers from her recent back surgery at Shriners Children Hospital in Philadelphia. The hospital used a new surgical procedure to help stop the progression of the curvature of Michelle's spine. Prete's mother, Merna (seen at left with Michelle), says she wants others to understand how great the Shriners organization is and how they provide expert medical care for kids at no expense to the family.

Top photo courtesy Merna Prete
Left photo by Ted Brown

Town says watch out for coyotes

"Be aware of coyotes," is the message from the Town of Halton Hills for area residents.

Warren Harris, the Town's Manger of Parks and Open Space, said it's that time of year when a shortage of food or breeding habits can draw coyotes closer to residents' homes.

He said while it's not unusual for coyotes to be seen in natural areas like Hungry Hollow or along the Bruce Trail there are steps that can be taken to avoid potential conflicts.

"If you encounter a coyote while enjoying the local trails, don't turn your back and run from a coyote, but back away while remaining calm," said Harris.

"Whistles and personal alarm devices can frighten an approaching or threatening animal, and flashlights are a good deterrent for night walks. Always keep your dog on leash and never let your dog chase a coyote as it could result in injury to your pet."

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