

Liam poster child for courage

Plucky youth to participate in McMaster Children's Hospital telethon

By Stephanie Hounsell
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Nine-year-old Liam McGibbon is sitting on his couch holding a string of brightly-coloured beads. Each bead represents a time the lit-

tle boy had to be brave over the past 10 months.

There are 42 beads. The red ones he earned for being "poked" with a needle, while the white ones represent painful dressing changes. The two orange beads are for the two major surgeries he underwent last November.

"Every time I had to be brave she (hospital worker) gave me a bead," Liam explained.

The bravery beads are just one creative way staff at McMaster Children's Hospital help their patients get through the tough times.

Looking at Liam now, it's hard to believe it was just six months ago that he endured two brain surgeries — one almost 10 hours long — after a CT scan detected a tumour.

Liam is a poster child for courage. Now he's also a poster child for McMaster Children's Hospital in Hamilton, having been named the 2009 ambassador for its fundraising campaign.

On Sunday, Liam will participate

in the hospital's annual Celebration telethon, which will air on CHCH from 1 to 7 p.m.

Liam will be interviewed live and his story will be featured in a documentary.

He was also recently part of a radio-thon, and his face appears on bus shelter signs in the Hamilton area to promote the telethon.

Liam and his parents, Jason and Kimberley, are lending their full support to the Celebration campaign because they've experienced first-hand all the hospital has to offer.

"We have a world-class hospital so close to us in Milton," Kimberley said. "My prayer is that parents would not have to face a life-threatening illness with their children, but if they do, we want them to know about McMaster Children's Hospital."

It was a routine CT scan at Milton District Hospital in July of last year that turned up something unusual. Liam had migraines — which run in the family — and the doctor wanted to check things out.

What he found was a mass in Liam's brain. It was totally unrelated to the migraines, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because they led to the CT scan.

The tumour didn't appear to be cancerous, but it was in a very delicate part of the brain.

The McGibbons were told it would be a four-to-six-week wait for Liam to see a neurosurgeon in Toronto. Not knowing what they were dealing with, the wait seemed impossibly long.

"We were shocked at not only the news but also that we would have to wait so long to begin to investigate what exactly this mass was in our son's brain," Kimberley said.

Her sister-in-law suggested they find a neurosurgeon at McMaster Children's Hospital, affectionately known as Mac Kids.

Less than a week later, Liam was



SIGNING ON TO HELP: Liam McGibbon stands in front of the sign he's featured in to raise awareness for this Sunday's telethon.

in to see renowned neurosurgeon and researcher Dr. Sheila Singh.

There was no doubt about it — the tumour had to be removed or it could grow and begin pressing on other parts of his brain. The two surgeries to remove the tumour occurred just one week apart, taking its toll on the McGibbon family, which includes four kids.

"The toughest is not knowing," Kimberley said. "The unknown is hard. Waiting between the surgeries was hard."

Liam's parents stayed at the nearby Ronald McDonald house while he was in critical care.

Fortunately, Liam recovered quickly and was successful in his goal to soon resume playing basketball.

It was the little touches at McMaster that meant so much, Kimberley said. Volunteers make quilts for the beds so the rooms don't feel clinical, and a Wii video

game system was brought to Liam's room to cheer him up during a particularly low point.

"It was the first time we saw him smile in a long time," his mom said.

And then there's the Child Life program, run by volunteers and social workers who see to kids' emotional needs.

A pastor at The Sanctuary church in Milton, Jason said he and his wife tried to find the meaning in what Liam had gone through.

"For us, a big one (question) was, 'What might God use this for?'" he said.

The opportunity to point other families to Mac Kids is quite possibly the answer, he said.

"We feel blessed to have been there."

To make a donation, visit www.mackids.ca.

Stephanie Hounsell can be reached at sthiesse@miltoncanadianchampion.com.

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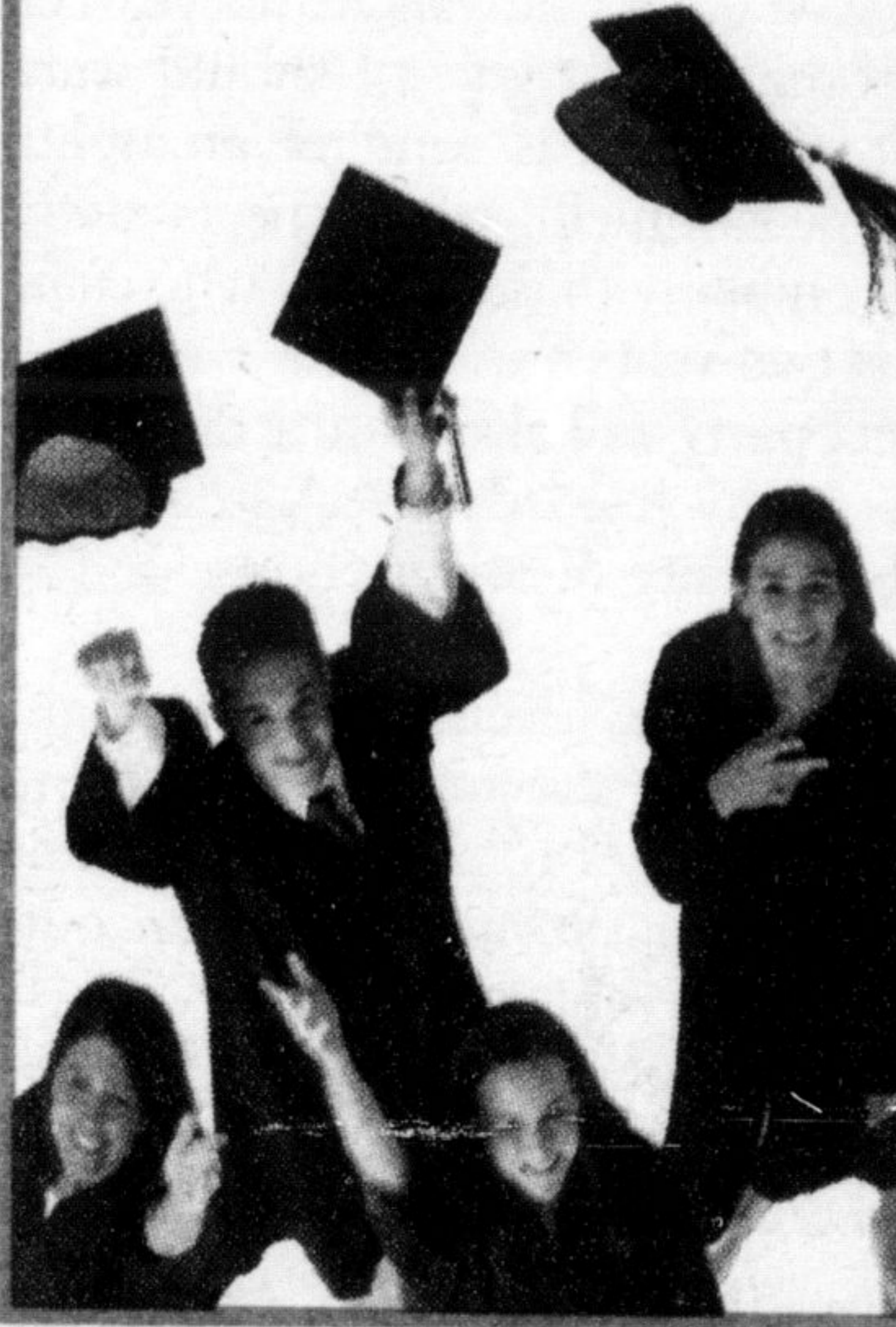
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FRI. MON-THURS 7:00, 9:30; SAT-SUN 1:15, 4:10, 7:00, 9:30

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: BATTLE OF THE SMITHSONIAN (PG)
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FRI. MON-THURS 6:40, 9:20; SAT-SUN 1:00, 4:00, 6:40, 9:20

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: BATTLE OF THE SMITHSONIAN (PG)
(FRIGHTENING SCENES) STAR & STROLLERS SCREENING, NO PASSES
THURS 1:00

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(LANGUAGE MAY OFFEND, VIOLENCE) R/RW/C/DV/S/B, NO PASSES
FRI. MON-THURS 6:45, 9:40; SAT-SUN 12:30, 3:40, 6:45, 9:40

ANGELS & DEMONS (14A)
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STAR TREK (PG) (VIOLENCE)
FRI. MON-THURS 6:50, 10:00; SAT-SUN 12:15, 3:30, 6:50, 10:00

STAR TREK (PG)
(VIOLENCE) STAR & STROLLERS SCREENING THURS 1:00

GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST (14A)
(SEXUAL CONTENT, LANGUAGE MAY OFFEND)
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