

Blood donations honour an angel

BY ANDY COMBER

Katelyn Laforet never reached her second birthday, yet her spirit is inspiring others to donate blood and in turn give the gift of life to so many others.

"Children think we are their strength, the truth is they are ours," said Katelyn's parents, Debbie Newman and Brian Laforet, speaking at a blood donor clinic held in memory of their daughter at the Portuguese Club in Leamington, April 4.

"We were extra blessed," they said, speaking of what

they call "Katelyn's Golden Journey."

Katelyn was born August 1, 2003, a healthy size of 8 pounds, but within a month she became very lethargic - the first sign of serious trouble.

After six days in a Windsor hospital, doctors found disturbing blood levels and transferred Katelyn to a London children's hospital. There she would spend six weeks, receiving tests, blood transfusions and other extensive investigations.

Transferred to Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, Katelyn was six months old

when doctors confirmed that she was suffering from a rare metabolic disorder, Congenital Disorder of Glycosylation (CDG). Katelyn's tiny body could not transfer the sugars needed to absorb protein, causing varying degrees of disabilities.

"During our time in Toronto, Brian would drive for four to five hours after a full day of work every Friday to spend time with us before heading back out Sunday nights," said Debbie, speaking about what would become the family routine for much of

Katelyn's life.

"Katelyn didn't know any difference ... that was her life. She remained happy through it all ... it was her laughter and smiles that kept us going," said Debbie, "Katelyn could wrap anyone she met around her finger in an instant with those big puffy cheeks."

After spending 14 months of her 20 months of life in hospitals, Katelyn surrendered to the ravages of CDG, passing away March 28, 2005.

"You might think that life was unfair, or have pity for us, but we are extremely fortunate people," said Debbie, "We were able to have the privilege of caring for and raising one of Life's Little Miracles."

In her short life, Katelyn received 103 blood transfusions, "gifts" which prolonged her life for as much as 18 months. "We would have lost her in the first five weeks if it were not for that miracle," said Brian.

"We are extremely grateful to so many who donate blood."

Through Katelyn's life journey with them, Debbie and Brian said they have learned to appreciate life and



Over 150 people visited a recent blood donor clinic in Leamington held in memory of Katelyn Laforet, pictured here on her first birthday, August 1, 2004.



Brandy VanEvery of Leamington, 22, donates blood at a Canadian Blood Services clinic held in memory of Katelyn Laforet, April 4 in Leamington.

understand the importance and value of giving blood.

"Katelyn changed many lives and accomplished more in her short life than most people do in a lifetime."

Debbie said over 150 people came to the blood clinic in Leamington, the third held in memory of Katelyn, adding to hundreds of donations made in her honour here and around the world.

"Anyone can donate blood from anywhere, any-

time and fill out a card to have their blood donated in honour of our Angel," said Debbie and Brian, who maintain a website called "Angel Katelyn" found online at www.caring-bridge.org/ca/katelyn/.

Canadian Blood Services will hold their next blood clinic in Essex April 17 at the Legion Hall beginning at 2 p.m. For information, or to learn how you can donate, call 1-888-2-DONATE (1-888-236-6283).

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