

NEWS

HOCKEY 4 HOPE FIGHTS CANCER



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These players sure look pretty in pink. That's because they're taking to the ice March 29 in Binghamton, N.Y., to kick cancer in the teeth during the fifth annual Hockey 4 Hope charity game.

Garrett Perry

If there's one topic of fighting in hockey that doesn't need debate, it's the fight against cancer.

For Brian Laing, the founder of Hockey 4 Hope, the fight is personal. His Aunt Connie was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004 and died in 2006 after a lengthy battle with the disease. Throughout her treatment, she endured physical pain and financial hardships that left a lasting impression on Laing. He realized cancer is not only a deadly disease, but an expensive one as well.

"I knew there had to be more people in the world like my Aunt Connie," Laing says. "And the more people I spoke to, the more struggles I heard of."

On March 29, at the SUNY Broome Ice Center in Binghamton, N.Y., Hockey 4 Hope will hold its fifth annual charity game to raise money for cancer research.

Laing, 36, grew up playing hockey in Binghamton. When he was 16, he left home to play prep hockey at The Hill School in Pottstown, Pa., and later went on to play with the defunct Great Northern Snow Devils of the Eastern Junior League and then SUNY Oswego in Div. III of the American Collegiate Hockey Association. So it was only natural that he opted to organize a hockey charity game in 2010 to raise money for cancer treatment and commemorate the life of his late aunt.

"It was a rinky-dink charity game that had no cohesiveness whatsoever," he says. "Basically just organized chaos."

It struck a chord in the community, however, raising \$4,000. Soon after, Laing widened the charity's scope to support all forms of cancer treatment.

"You can't discriminate against cancer," he says, "because cancer doesn't discriminate."

Since that inaugural game, Hockey 4 Hope has raised almost \$70,000 – the goal this year is \$40,000 – with proceeds going to the Lourdes Hospital Geller Oncology Fund, a charity that echoes Laing's appetite to provide patients with financial assistance.

"When I met Dr. Marilyn Geller and learned more about the Geller Oncology Fund, what they stand for and how they help patients receive oncology treatment...it just made sense," Laing says.

Every year, 34 roster spots for the game are filled with people from all over North America. And anywhere from 40 to 50 more are pencilled in on a waiting list. Every participant plays for a parent, sibling, partner, friend or an extended family member who has battled or is still battling cancer.

"It's not about the guys skating," Laing says. "It's about the cause, for whom we are skating for and why we're here."

Every year a river of pink pours onto the ice as players adorn the internationally recognized color of breast cancer awareness on everything from skate laces and pucks to helmets and custom jerseys. Even the ice is dyed pink.

Now in its fifth year, the charity game has become an annual event in Binghamton.

"I'm not surprised by the support we get from the Binghamton community," Laing says. "It is more amazement."

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