

Funds to help student attend NHL game

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By [Duane Hicks](#)

Staff and students at Fort Frances High School, along with individuals and businesses in the community, have come together to help a FFHS student with a terminal illness do some of the things he's always wanted to do, including attend an NHL game over the March Break.

Grade 12 student Chase Copenace was diagnosed with a Stage 4 gliosarcoma brain tumour, which is aggressive and terminal, but the school has rallied around him to raise funds, said FFHS teacher Denise Rybuck, who has been lead organizer of the fundraising efforts.

"Chase, his girlfriend, Summer, and her family, her mom, her stepdad, and her two little sisters, the family Chase resides with, will be attending the Jets versus Blackhawks NHL Game on March 15," Rybuck noted.

"I simply put a call out for tickets on Facebook and people answered," she explained.

"This proves that social media can be used for good things.

"Numerous people have stepped forward to help make this dream a reality for Chase," Rybuck added.

"We have tickets for the game donated by former Fort Frances residents Erin Cockburn-Tronrud and Geoff Halwachs," she noted. "Larry Patrick, also a former Fort Frances resident has been helping us to organize a meet-and-greet with Duncan Keith.

"Jackie McCormick, a local business owner, has helped to secure two nights' accommodations at the Delta Hotel in Winnipeg," cited Rybuck.

"Another former Fort Frances resident has helped organize dinner reservations at the Moxie's Restaurant at MTS Centre."

The school currently is holding a raffle for an iPad Mini that was donated by Seven Generations Education Institute.

The draw will be made tomorrow after lunch, with all proceeds going directly to Copenace.

Meanwhile, a pizza fundraiser lunch for Fort High staff and students was held last Thursday and Friday at the cafeteria, along with a raffle for Muskie gear (a hoodie, toque, mitts, and socks).

These raised \$2,842.

Safeway donated in-kind all drinks and cookies for the pizza fundraiser, noted Rybuck.

On top of that, with Copenace having worked at Safeway, the staff there donated \$1,045—boosting the fundraising total to \$3,892.

"Their generous support and the monetary donation has helped us to ensure that Chase will be able to attend the NHL game, all expenses covered," said Rybuck.

She added Safeway manager Kevin Langford told her that Chase took pride in how he looked at work and always ensured he adhered to the dress code.

"It was something Kevin mentioned a few times and I do think it speaks to Chase's character, sense of pride and in a job well-done," Rybuck noted.

And the support hasn't ended there.

Calder Law Office donated \$500 and OSSTF District 5B will be matching contributions made by its members dollar for dollar.

A final total isn't known yet as members are able to continue to donate up until tomorrow (March 9).

Rybuck said it's important to note that Donna Erickson, Janine Tucker, Jen Leishman, Bill Daley, Gen Bliss, Tammy Romyn, Joyce Scott, and Lisa George, all FFHS staff, have been very helpful in these fundraising efforts, as well.

"If I have forgotten to mention any names, I apologize in advance as many people have stepped forward to offer support in some way or another," she remarked.

In terms of the success of the fundraisers, Rybuck said she has been "humbled and grateful" at the outpouring of support shown by both staff and students at Fort Frances High School, but was "not surprised."

"Fort Frances High School is a community that cares for the staff and students who are a part of it," she noted.

"The generosity and kindness being shown to Chase is an example of how our school community cares for each other.

"Even though he is not able to attend school right now, he is and will always be a Fort Frances High School Muskie," Rybuck added.

"We want him to know that we are thinking of him and want him to achieve as many of his dreams as possible while he is still well enough to do so."

And there will be more fundraisers to come.

"We are also hoping to hold a few other fundraisers after the March Break," said Rybuck, adding one of social sciences teacher Donna Erickson's classes, a Grade 12 class in which Copenace would have been a student, has come up with many great ideas.

Copenace has been in touch with Rybuck and she says he has been "very humble through all of this."

"He has said 'thank you' more times than I can count," she recalled. "[But] I want him to know, and everyone to know, that we are not doing this for thanks.

"We just want to help Chase experience his first NHL game, give him a few days where maybe he can focus on having fun and maybe forget that he is sick, enjoy this time with his family, and make some wonderful memories.

"There is a quote that I keep coming across since all of this started," said Rybuck. "It is by Robert Ingersoll, 'We rise by lifting others.'

"We, as a community, are supporting Chase and for this outpouring of support, I am extremely grateful," she added.