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Young cancer survivors create T-shirt design for surf shop

By Jennifer Cohen
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Encouraged by performance artist Perego, Tyler Harrison, of Coral Springs, works on a T-shirt design for Ron Jon's Surf Shop.

For the first time in the company's 50-year history, Ron Jon Surf Shop turned over its T-shirt design process to a bunch of kids.

But not just any kids.

With the help of South Florida performance artist Perego, young cancer survivors were invited to paint a mural at the store's Sawgrass Mills store location in May that has been reproduced on a T-shirt now on sale at Ron Jon's. Proceeds from the T-shirt, which costs \$14.99, \$12.99 for kids — will benefit the Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation.

"We were looking for a way to reach out to the local community," said Heather Lewis, Ron Jon's director of marketing. "We heard about the Jessica June Foundation and we liked the idea that the children could participate and be involved hands-on with the actual design."

One of the children working on a T-shirt design was C.J. George, 12, of Miami Lakes. He was diagnosed with Stage 3 lymphoma when he was 9-years-old. After two years of chemotherapy, he is now in remission or what is classified as NED or No Evidence of Disease.

"We are not totally done with his treatment, but we are done with the heavy stuff," said his mother, Dawn. "We just try to do what we can while he is cancer-free."

C.J. and his family were recipients of a grant provided by the Fort Lauderdale-based Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation. The Foundation operates out of Broward General Medical Center in Fort Lauderdale and serves the patients of all seven hospitals treating pediatric oncology in the South Florida tricounty area.

Founded in 2004 by Sandra Muvdi, Jessica June Children's Cancer Foundation's mission is to

provide emergency financial assistance for children fighting cancer to ensure access to basic human necessities during their struggle. Muvdi founded the organization as a tribute to her only child, Jessica June Eiler Muvdi, who lost her battle with leukemia in 2003.

Since the Financial Assistance Program started in 2006, the foundation provided emergency funding, hope, compassion and love for nearly 1,100 South Florida children and family members whose lives were impacted by childhood cancer. Since 2006, the foundation has spent about \$485,000 helping families.

The nonprofit organization also helped Tyler Harrison and his family with a \$2,000 grant. Tyler, who also helped with the T-shirt design project, is a first grader at Country Hills Elementary School in Coral Springs. He is 21 months into remission after being diagnosed with neuroblastoma Stage 4 in March 2009 when he was 5-years-old.

"That money allowed us to pay some of our medical bills, our car payment," said his mother Aimee Harrison. "It made things much easier on us. Jessica June helped us when we needed it."

"The children invited [to paint] have been assisted by the Foundation and most are still undergoing cancer treatment, and they are all very excited about the opportunity to participate in such a unique and interesting legacy-building artistic project," Muvdi said. "Projects like this offer our children and their families a respite from battling a life-threatening illness and gives them a chance to enjoy a fun time with their fellow patients, families and siblings."

Wearing a suit covered in multicolored paint splatters and drippings, Perego helped the children tap their creativity and come up with a design for the T-shirt.

"I'm excited to work with the kids and unleash their creativity," Perego said. "Everyone is an artist and everyone is creative. The kids were great. They just jumped right in and started painting."

The design project, Muvdi said, "gave the kids a break from cancer and allowed them to come and do something with other kids who are going through what they went through.

"It created a sense of excitement for them knowing that something they helped to create will be on a T-shirt," she said. "They can say 'I made this, here is my brush stroke. I created something permanent.'"

It's also an achievement for the surf shop, said Debbie Harvey, Ron Jon's president and chief operating officer. "We have created hundreds of unique designs and sold thousands and thousands of T-shirts over the past 50 years, but this T-shirt will truly be 'one-of-a-kind.'"

For more information about the Jessica June Children's Cancer, call 954-593-5603 or visit www.jjccf.org.