

## **Still fighting: Cancer victim lives on through example, fund**

By CHRISTOPHER KROMER Tribune Chronicle

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Throughout his 32-year life, Thomas A. Detesco — or “Tommy” as he was often called — was many things. He was a brother, son, movie buff and avid baseball fan. But most of all, those who knew Tommy say he was — and is — an inspiration.

Detesco, a Canfield native who died Aug. 31, 2007, after a nearly 30-year battle with a brain tumor, has posthumously lent his name to a special foundation that will fund research at the Cleveland Clinic.

The mission of the Tommy Detesco Fund for Adolescents and Young Adults, says father Dr. Thomas N. Detesco of Poland, is to raise \$2 million in the next two years to establish a position at the Cleveland Clinic focusing on brain tumors in adolescents and young adults.

“Even before Tom passed away, I knew I wanted to express my appreciation to the Cleveland Clinic,” said Detesco, who said the idea for the fund grew with the help of the Clinic.

“It became apparent that there was a deeper richness to his story,” he said.

Part of that richness emanated from the younger Detesco’s sense of contentment with the circumstances of his life. Although he traveled extensively to hospitals and treatment centers throughout the country, Tommy Detesco remained positive throughout his illness, Detesco said.

“We would be driving to his chemotherapy treatment or to get an MRI,” said Detesco. “And he would look at me and say, ‘You know, Dad, I really love my life. I don’t need anything else.’”

That contentment arose out of a strong spiritual sense that characterized Tommy’s approach to life. Without the spiritual component, it is difficult to understand Tommy’s life, said Detesco.

“He would be able to literally take one moment at a time, without thinking ahead,” said Detesco, who says his son’s ability to live in the moment had a profound effect on him and Tommy’s siblings and mother.

First diagnosed with a brain tumor following a seizure at the age of three, Tommy endured several setbacks and complications, including a herniation of the brain in the last 10 months of his life that took the vision from his right eye. Typical of Tommy Detesco, however, he didn’t let it dampen his enthusiasm for life.

“He would say, ‘That’s OK, I’ve got a left eye,’” said Detesco. “He never got depressed.”

On May 7, Detesco announced the official launch of the foundation, which seeks to advance research in the area of adolescent and young adult brain tumors.

“Tommy was able to extend his life a half dozen years because of medical innovations,” Detesco said. “They all helped him. That extension of his life allowed him to make an impact.”

Detesco said his son was a model for young individuals afflicted with a life-threatening illness.

“He forever changed me personally,” said the father of his son. “It was a combination of his humility and his gentleness that people found most admirable.”

For those facing the news of a life-threatening illness to their child, Detesco encourages them to follow Tommy’s example.

“What we learned from Tommy’s illness is that you have to make a conscious effort to look at things

in the present. Stop and look at every unit of time, extract the most out of it and use it to the benefit of the person and yourself."