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## Event raises money in honor of Pottsgrove teacher to fund research for a cure

By Gailynne Ferguson, For 21st Century Media

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Nestled in the heart of Oley sits Union Jack's Inn on the Manatawny. What is usually a gathering place where friends meet for good food, craft beers and live music suddenly became overrun Saturday, Oct. 25, with 67 witches, devils, pirates, rockers, artists, Mother Nature and many others all dancing to the music of Jeffery Kerchner and the five-man band of the Left Edge to support a "nerd" and those like her.

The event was "The MS Monster Mash Bash cuz MS is BS" fundraiser. It may sound silly to think that someone would hold a Halloween costume party as a fundraiser, but Cathie Rubbo and the friends of Melissa Sosenko DeStefano know that it is Destefano's humor that will help her through her illness, and this writer couldn't agree more.

In 2010, DeStefano, a teacher at Pottsgrove School District, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, an autoimmune disease that affects the central nervous system, after she experienced bouts of numbness in her face and optic neuritis in her right eye. She soon found herself at the University of Pennsylvania where she began treatment to keep the disease as stable as possible. Since her diagnosis, "Mel's Support Squad" has raised approximately \$48,000 for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society through five MS Walks and two MuckFests, and an additional \$800 at the Oct. 25 event to help fund research efforts in the fight against the disease.

Looking around the room, it was obvious that DeStefano has a strong support squad. There were nothing but smiles as people conversed and shared their stories, renewed old friendships and joined in the fun of the evening, all to keep supporting DeStefano and others in their fight.

Kerchner opened the evening for The Left Edge with a slow-paced rendition of the Monster Mash and other songs to help set the mood for the evening. Guests piled into the event hall of Union Jack's and were met by yellow-suspender-wearing "nerds," Cathie and Melissa. Upon entrance to the event, guests were made aware of the photo booth that was set up by Theresa Confer-Standish, owner of Theresa's Memorable Events. The Left Edge did their part as well with Buddy (guitar) and Smoky (bass) showing up as the Blues Brothers, Eric donning his crazy clown mask while on keyboard, playing the revved up version of the Monster Mash, and Tom (drums) and Jack (guitar) backing them up. Soon, the beat of the music persuaded a pirate and devil to hit the dance floor, motioning others to join them. Kerchner, The Left Edge and Theresa all donated their time while Union Jack's donated the room and kept the food costs to a minimum to help support the MS Society. The event was topped off with raffles for gift baskets, a 50/50 drawing and costume awards.

DeStefano and others in her position realize that life does not stop with a diagnosis of MS; however, chances are it will need to be adjusted continuously as the disease progresses. Over the past 25 plus years, a variety of fundraisers have helped launch many disease-modifying drugs, from injections and infusion therapies to, most recently, oral medications, but there is no cure.

Throughout the disease's course, the illness may cause problems with vision, gait, fatigue, numbness, spasticity, paralysis or a shortened life span, but each person experiences different symptoms. These medications are designed to help slow the progression, enabling many to continue a very normal, but modified life-style for a much longer time than in years past. With between 250,000 and 350,000 cases of multiple sclerosis in the United States alone, and approximately 200 more being diagnosed each week, it is definitely a serious and growing cause.

For more information on Mel's Support Squad, visit the website at <http://melssupportsquad.com>. To learn more about MS, visit <http://www.nationalmssociety.org>.

URL: <http://www.berksmontnews.com/general-news/20141113/event-raises-money-in-honor-of-pottsgrove-teacher-to-fund-research-for-a-cure>

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