

Tommy Socks are in Fashion at RBC

Students wear green footwear to show support for ill student

By Brian Deakyne

RED BANK - Sometimes, helping a stranger is easier than it seems.

In Molly Riddle's case, helping a complete stranger fight a disease was much easier than even she thought it would be.

Riddle, who just completed her freshman year at Red Bank Catholic High School, came up with the idea behind the "Play For Tommy" campaign during which spring athletes wore socks to support Tommy Cleary, an RBC freshman this year who was diagnosed with leukemia last spring.

Because of the disease and a rigorous treatment plan, Cleary was unable to attend his middle school graduation and missed the start of his freshman year at Red Bank Catholic.

It was then that Riddle, working with Red Bank Catholic religion teacher Deb Flego, created the campaign for Cleary, intended for spring athletes at RBC.

Although Riddle, who played on the girls' lacrosse freshman team, never met Cleary before the fundraiser, she said it was her uncle who had given her the inspiration.

concept, Riddle said, there were some challenges that came along with it.

"There were some things that were more difficult than I thought it would be," she said. "I had to get permission from the athletic director and he had to get permission from the referees to wear the socks during games."

The Cleary family has been overwhelmed by the show of support they have received from the community.

Tommy, who had a bone marrow transplant at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) in April, now is recuperating at home and is "doing well," his mother Kathy said.

Tommy heard about the Tommy socks campaign while at CHOP and was amazed at the support from fellow students.

"I thought it was amazing. It was so sweet," Kathy Cleary said.

The socks have been just one aspect of the support the family has seen from RBC and St. James communities and neighbors and friends.

"It's been amazing. People have been praying for him and making meals, sell-

"My uncle had the same disease and it was really his idea," Riddle said. "He said that would be something he would have wanted if he were Tommy's age."

Riddle then reached out to Cleary through Twitter and began the adventure that quickly became a school-wide trend.

"It started off with just the spring sports, but everyone really liked that idea," Riddle said. "It spread to other sports and soon everyone in the school was ordering the socks."

Although the socks, which are green with gold lettering that say "Playing for Tommy," were a good

ing bracelets, helping with my daughters ... People have even walked our dog and done housecleaning," she said. "You don't know how blessed you are."

For Riddle, the entire experience has been worthwhile, especially something for a cause like helping Cleary.

"It's pretty cool," Riddle said. "I was able to get to know him through it and people always come up to me and tell me that they think it's a good idea. It's pretty cool for me."

Anyone wishing to order socks can email Riddle at theriddles216@comcast.net or mollyr1218@gmail.com.