

Lion sets sights on sacking leukemia

Farmington boy, 2, visited at hospital by football star Porcher

By Sue Mason
Staff Writer

Matthew Goldi wasn't sure what the fuss was about. All he knew was that the man whose lap he chose to sit in was good at banging stuffed toys together.

"This time we worked on sacking the quarterback; next time we'll work on some moves," Robert Porcher told the 2-year-old Farmington resident.

A Detroit Lions defensive lineman for six years, Porcher was at Children's Hospital on Michigan last week to visit some of the youngest victims of childhood cancer, including Matthew, who has acute lymphocytic leukemia.

Arranged by Leukemia Research Life Inc., it was the first time the Rochester Hills resident had ever visited the Detroit hospital. He focused his time on visiting children on the oncology floor, offering words of encouragement and autographed pictures.

"When I walked into the rooms, I couldn't get over how upbeat the kids are," Porcher said. "I play a game and I may be sore the next day, but it will go away. To see how strong they are puts in perspective what I do."

Porcher is the honorary chair of LRL's 17th annual Evening of Hope dinner-dance, slated for Saturday, Feb. 28, at Laurel Manor in Livonia.

The evening will begin at 6:30 p.m. with cocktails and a silent auction filled with sports memorabilia and travel and entertainment packages. The 8 p.m. sit-down dinner will be followed by

the always-popular dessert table, raffle and dancing to the music of Vizzini.

Joining Porcher as guests will be Rich Fisher, Denise Dador of WXYZ-TV and Lila Lazarus of WDIV-TV, who are serving as masters of ceremony, and soccer star Bryan "The Goose" Finnerly.

More than 1,000 people are expected to turn out to help raise \$80,000 for childhood cancer research. Tickets for the dinner-dance cost \$60 each and are available by calling Eileen Surma at (313) 681-6647.

Dedicated to research

The nonprofit organization is dedicated to the elimination of childhood cancers through research at Children's Hospital, and since its inception in 1981, LRL has raised more than \$2 million.

"Ninety-seven cents of every dollar we raise goes to research," said Eric DeVore. He and wife Sharon were instrumental in starting LRL in 1981. "We're a totally volunteer organization and the single largest contributor to childhood cancer research at Children's Hospital."

"But what we really want to do is get the message out that cancer is the No. 1 killer disease of children."

In fact, it was Sharon who contacted the Detroit Lions organization in hopes of getting one of the team members to help with the benefit.

Her letter was passed on to Porcher, who was on his way to San Diego, Calif., to see the Super Bowl and then Hawaii for the Pro Bowl.

"I found the letter in my bag and read it on my way back," Porcher said. "I said, 'Oh, man, I have to call as soon as I get back. I hope she hasn't found some-

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Robert Porcher
—Detroit Lions

one."

"We are blessed to have you," said Sharon. "We knew you were going to be a part of us, you just didn't know."

'It wasn't good'

But such was not the case with Matthew, who was diagnosed with acute lymphocytic leukemia in June 1997. His mother, Laurie, a nurse at neighboring Harper Hospital, "just knew it wasn't good" when her son developed pinpoint spots of blood on his skin after he developed a cold.

Matthew was diagnosed with leukemia on June 3, 1997, and now receives chemotherapy daily, either intravenously, orally or through the spine, as part of his 130-week treatment.

The cancer attacks blood-forming tissue, bone marrow, lymph

nodes and spleen. The disease is in remission, and Matthew has a 65 percent chance of a five-year survival rate, according to Laurie.

"We still lose 25 percent of our children to cancer," she said. "These little people don't get the attention they should. Childhood cancer doesn't get the research dollars it should."

"For you to be able to say you want to do this ... bless you. I don't have to power to use my face or body to educate people, so it's important to us to have you say this matters to you."

Porcher deflected the compliment with a "no thanks needed." The father of 3-year-old Morgan feels he is doing a lot if he can get some of the children to smile.

"That was no problem. An 11-year-old Lions fan was grinning from ear to ear after Porcher whispered in his ear and even threats of tickling couldn't get him to reveal the message."

But Porcher did on the way down to the outpatient clinic.

"He told me he played football and was a running back," Porcher said. "I told him I have running backs for lunch."

"I'm glad I came down here today. I'll be coming back; I plan on popping in from time to time."



PHOTO BY ERIC DEVORE

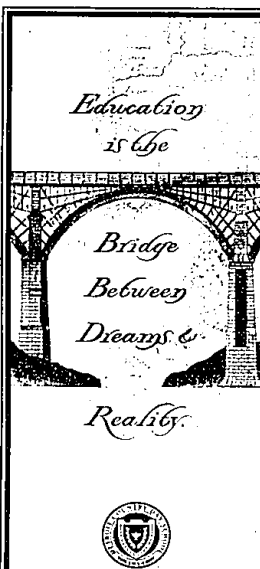
Lion heart: Robert Porcher with Matthew Goldi, 2.

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