

Miss Farmington uncaps, assists kidney dialysis fund-raiser

Throughout Jennifer Hoemke's year-long reign as 1997 Miss Farmington-Farmington Hills, serving the community has been her main platform. That platform will be covered with aluminum pop tabs if the 24-year-old Farmington Hills resident has anything to say about it.

Hoemke, who soon ends her local title stint but competes June 18-20 in the Miss Michigan Scholarship Program in Muskegon, recently kicked off another campaign. It's to aid dialysis patients at Children's Hospital in Detroit.

Revenue generated through "Pop a Top So Dialysis Won't Stop" will be divided to help fund field trips for cooped-up patients in the dialysis unit at Children's and keep expensive dialysis machines running while patients wait for donors to be found.

"These children spend so much time together inside the hospital," Hoemke said during a recent interview at her home. "Why not spend some time outside of the hospital? They have so much camaraderie because they're going through the same thing."

As Hoemke answered ques-



Can do: Jennifer Hoemke wants people to get into the routine of saving can tabs.

tions, she sat at her kitchen table. Resting on top of it was the household collection of tabs, in a nearly-filled Easter basket.

The self-confident, striking redhead would like nothing more than to see other households doing the same. She hopes the practice becomes as routine and widespread as separating recyclable bottles from cans, thus

helping and cheering up many patients who need it.

"I think it really can work," she said. "You have to have more than a few people or a few organizations working on it. You need an entire community, entire state or entire country working on it."

"But it takes two seconds to pop a tab off a recyclable can and start collecting them. It takes nothing at all. And when you think of how much we drink, that could add up real quick."

As the Easter basket of tabs might suggest, the 1992 Farmington High School graduate isn't just paying lip service to the cause. Her hope is that others drink up her suggestion.

Idea transplant

Actually, some of the credit for getting the project rolling belongs to Ginny Morris, executive director of the Miss Farmington-Farmington Hills Scholarship Program. (In July, it will be renamed the Miss Farmington-Oakland County Scholarship Program.)

"They were doing it in Pennsylvania, where my parents live," Morris said. "They were doing a fund-raiser for a child

who needed a kidney transplant. I brought it (the idea) back to Jennifer."

Hoemke took the suggestion to heart. She began collecting the pop tops in January, augmenting her own pile by hitting up work colleagues of her parents, Girl Scouts and other residents in the area.

Six boxes of tabs were sent to Haggerty Metal in Livonia, where they were melted down and bought for just \$39, or from 40-to-47 cents per pound.

That shows money for dialysis patients won't amount to much unless many people adopt the routine of snapping off pop, beer or juice tabs and tossing them into a jar or basket at home, then taking them to drop-off points such as at the William Coatick Activities Center. Hub caps and other "pure" aluminum also can be turned in.

According to Hoemke, the campaign would undoubtedly get a publicity boost if she wins the Miss Michigan title.

"If I do win, I'll have the backing of the state, which will make it a lot easier and easier to promote this."

But even if she doesn't win in

Muskegon, she wants to continue her pop top quest as long as she can. "This means a lot to me."

To set up a drop-off point for aluminum beverage tabs, contact pageant headquarters, (248) 471-9042.

'A chance to feel ... normal'

Life can be a tiresome struggle for children who are constantly tethered to dialysis machines. So why not help brighten their day with a field trip or two?

Lisa Jesswein speaks from experience about how uplifting a visit to Cedar Point can be. Jesswein, 31, who does the female character voices for "Dick Purtan's People" on WOMC-FM, received kidney transplants at ages 16 and 25. Between the ages of 12-16, while attending school in Sterling Heights, she was hooked up to dialysis machines at Children's Hospital in Detroit.

That hospital's dialysis unit is the beneficiary of "Pop a Top So Dialysis Won't Stop," the fund-raiser being spearheaded by Jennifer Hoemke.

"A lot of times, these kids don't have a lot," said Jesswein, who has pledged her support to Hoemke's effort. "A lot of the field trips we went on as a

young teen, to Bob-Lo or Cedar Point ... it's a chance for the kids to feel like they're normal."

Some of the money generated by Hoemke's program will help pay for such field trips. The rest will help pay operational costs for the unit's dialysis machines.

Jesswein said the pop top campaign could also open minds to the plight of dialysis patients - which she has been for much of her life. She underwent hemodialysis while waiting for a kidney transplant. It finally arrived when she was 16. Then, at age 25, her twin sister donated a kidney.

Today, she feels fine. "I was there (at Children's Hospital) three days a week for four or five hours at a time, attached to a machine," Jesswein said. "The process is very taxing, very tiring. And on top of that, you're trying to be a normal person or a normal student. It's really tough on a kid."

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