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Tara's choice is to help out

Women's garage holds fundraiser for tot

MEREDITH MACLEOD

The Hamilton Spectator

(Oct 18, 2008)

Tucker is a beautiful little boy with big brown eyes who likes to blow kisses and play with his parents' car keys.

He's 27 months old but looks at least a year younger. He can't stand on his own, is fed through a tube in his stomach and says only a handful of words. He looks like his twin sister Avery's little brother.

She roars around, dancing and chattering, while Tucker sits quietly in his mother's arms.

Tucker Patterson has Leigh's syndrome, a rare and fatal genetic disorder that affects the central nervous system.

Basically, the mitochondria, the energy generators found in each cell of the body, do not work and begin to die.

Life expectancy is one to three years after onset. Tucker is now past the one-year mark and his parents, Kari and Dave, see every day with him as a gift.

Tara DeBruin, co-owner of Ladies Choice Auto Care in Hamilton, met Kari through a group called Bay Area Mothers of Multiples. DeBruin has twins just a month older than Tucker and Avery.

As soon as DeBruin learned of Tucker's diagnosis, she knew she wanted to help.

"As a friend and someone standing on the sidelines, you don't know what to do," she said. "As a business owner, it's an opportunity to reach out. Sometimes as an individual, you don't have the ability to do that."

It was her staff who suggested closing the shop to regular business and hosting an oil change and car safety clinic to raise money. They offered to work for free so that all proceeds could go to the Waterdown family.

"Our staff and suppliers have been wonderful," said DeBruin. "We have had products donated by suppliers and none of our team members are taking a wage that day so the profits of each oil change will be larger. It is our way of giving back."

Tucker's dad Dave, a firefighter with the Greater Toronto Airport Authority, will pitch in under the hood, too.

The family has held another fundraiser to raise money for Tucker's care and a fund in his name at McMaster Children's Hospital. Other events are planned, including a car wash in Waterdown next Saturday. Kari, 37, a police officer in Peel who is currently on leave, is keeping a detailed blog of Tucker's progress at tuckerstime.com.

It's an emotional read as Kari documents the turmoil of learning Tucker's diagnosis, the daily toil of caring for him and watching his motor skills deteriorate, and even the couple's decision to plan for their son's funeral.

"The website is my way of dealing with it.

"I've made a promise to Tucker to spread awareness any way I can so that his life is not in vain."

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The Spectator is beginning an occasional look at the charitable activities of local businesses. If you have an idea for a story, call 905-526-3408 or e-mail mmacleod@thespec.com.

Time for Tucker

What: Oil change and car safety clinic to raise money for Tucker Patterson and his family.

Where: Ladies Choice Auto Care, 1872 Main St. W., Hamilton, 905-524-9853, reachable online at ladieschoiceautocare.com.

When: Today, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.



Cathie Coward, the Hamilton Spectator

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