

Plainfield kids take a stand

Students join in Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month

By **MARK SPIVEY**
STAFF WRITER

PLAINFIELD — Students at one city elementary school took a stand against a killer Friday.

As part of national Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month, students at Barlow Elementary School showed up for classes wearing purple, the color associated with awareness of one of the world's deadliest cancers. Donations collected from students and staff Friday all will go to support the Pancreatic Cancer Action

Network, a national coalition promoting awareness of the disease and the identification of a cure, according to school PTO President Lauren Leaston, whose brother Larry died from the disease in 2000.

Pancreatic cancer worked its way into the national spotlight earlier this year when actor Patrick Swayze lost a 20-month battle against the disease.

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Students and staff at Barlow Elementary School in Plainfield participate Thursday in Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Day.

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According to the American Cancer Society, fewer than 4 percent of people diagnosed with pancreatic cancer survive five years; more than 42,000 new cases of the disease have been identified in 2009, while more than 35,000 people have died from it.

"The kids here, they have to wear uniforms, so when they have the opportunity to dress down, of course they're going to do it," Leaston joked Friday. "But the fact that they're raising money and awareness today is why I'm excited."

An informational table offering educational material about pancreatic cancer was set up near the front entrance of the school at the corner of Farragut Road and East Front Street, Leaston said, and students and staff were asked to donate \$1 apiece. But many gave \$10, \$20, and greater amounts, according to

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ON THE WEB

Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, www.pancan.org
 American Cancer Society, www.cancer.org

Leaston, who said an estimate of the total amount raised was not immediately available.

Leaston said her daughter LeiLani, a 7-year-old second-grader at the school, never got to meet Larry, who was 32 when he died of the disease less than four months after diagnosis. Larry, the oldest of four children, was a former football star at Plainfield High School and an Army veteran who went on to become a minister at Antioch Christian Church in New Brunswick.

"We have videos, so she gets a chance to hear him sing. Larry was like Lu-

ther Vandross Jr.," Lawson said.

Leaston said she knew next to nothing about pancreatic cancer before her brother was diagnosed, but she's been active with the action network for years. Inspired by what she said was a directive from President Barack Obama about performing grassroots community service, she said she hopes the entire Plainfield Public Schools district might participate in a pancreatic awareness event next year.

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